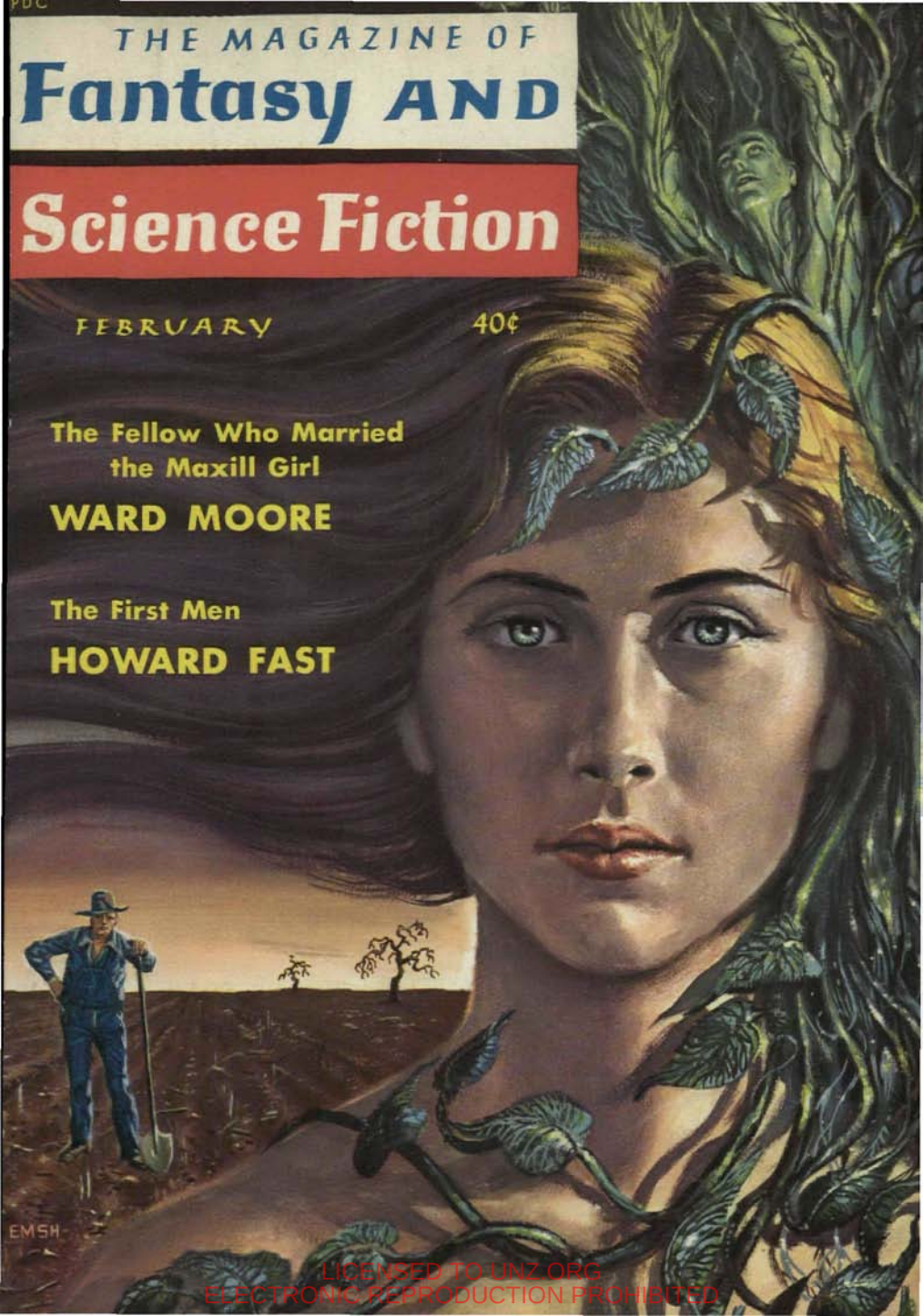

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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Cover by Emsh
(illustrating "The Fellow Who Married the Maxill Girl")

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Robert P. Mills*, EDITOR

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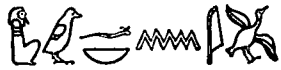

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The fourth in F&SF's distinguished series of stories by Howard Fast—beginning with the proposition that a child growing up among wolves will think like a wolf, and proceeding to a disturbing, ego-reducing parallel in our quite possible future.

THE FIRST MEN

by Howard Fast

By Airmail:

Calcutta, India
Nov. 4th, 1945

Mrs. Jean Arbalaid
Washington, D. C.

My dear sister:

I found it. I saw it with my own eyes, and thereby I am convinced that I have a useful purpose in life—overseas investigator for the anthropological whims of my sister. That, in any case, is better than boredom. I have no desire to return home; I will not go into any further explanations or reasons. I am neurotic, unsettled and adrift. I got my discharge in Karachi, as you know. I am very happy to be an ex-GI and a tourist, but it took me only a few weeks to become bored to distraction. So I was quite pleased to have a mission from you. The mission is completed.

It could have been more exciting. The plain fact of the matter is that the small Associated Press item you sent me was quite accurate in all of its details. The little village of Chunga is in Assam. I got there by 'plane, narrow gauge train and ox-cart—a fairly pleasant trip at this time of the year, with the back of the heat broken; and there I saw the child, who is now fourteen years old.

I am sure you know enough about India to realize that fourteen is very much an adult age for a girl in these parts—the majority of them are married by then. And there is no question about the age. I spoke at length to the mother and father, who identified the child by two very distinctive birthmarks. The identification was substantiated by relatives and other villagers—all of whom remembered the birthmarks. A circumstance not unusual or remarkable in these small villages.

The child was lost as an infant—at eight months, a common story, the parents working in the field, the child set down, and then the child gone. Whether it crawled

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at that age or not, I can't say; at any rate, it was a healthy, alert and curious infant. They all agree on that point.

How the child came to the wolves is something we will never know. Possibly a bitch who had lost her own cubs carried the infant off. That is the most likely story, isn't it? This is not lupus, the European variety, but *pallipes*, its local cousin, nevertheless a respectable animal in size and disposition, and not something to stumble over on a dark night. Eighteen days ago, when the child was found, the villagers had to kill five wolves to take her, and she herself fought like a devil out of hell. She had lived as a wolf for thirteen years.

Will the story of her life among the wolves ever emerge? I don't know. To all effects and purposes, she is a wolf. She cannot stand upright—the curvature of her spine being beyond correction. She runs on all fours and her knuckles are covered with heavy callus. They are trying to teach her to use her hands for grasping and holding, but so far unsuccessfully. Any clothes they dress her in, she tears off, and as yet she has not been able to grasp the meaning of speech, much less talk. The Indian anthropologist, Sumil Gojee, has been working with her for a week now, and he has little hope that any real communication will ever be possible. In our terms and by our measurements, she is a total idiot, an infantile imbecile, and it is likely that she will remain so for the rest of her life.

On the other hand, both Professor Gojee and Dr. Chalmers, a government health service man, who came up from Calcutta to examine the child, agree that there are no physical or hereditary elements to account for the child's mental condition, no malformation of the cranial area and no history of imbecilism in her background. Everyone in the village attests to the normalcy—indeed, alertness and brightness—of the infant; and Professor Gojee makes a point of the alertness and adaptability she must have required to survive for thirteen years among the wolves. The child responds excellently to reflex tests, and neurologically, she appears to be sound. She is strong—beyond the strength of a thirteen year old—wiry, quick in her movements, and possesses an uncanny sense of smell and hearing.

Professor Gojee has examined records of eighteen similar cases recorded in India over the past hundred years, and in every case, he says, the recovered child was an idiot in our terms—or a wolf in objective terms. He points out that it would be incorrect to call this child an idiot or an imbecile—any more than we would call a wolf an idiot or an imbecile. The child is a wolf, perhaps a very superior wolf, but a wolf nevertheless.

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I am preparing a much fuller report on the whole business. Meanwhile, this letter contains the pertinent facts. As for money—I am very well heeled indeed, with eleven hundred dollars I won in a crap game. Take care of yourself and your brilliant husband and the public health service.

Love and kisses,

Harry

By cable:

HARRY FELTON
HOTEL EMPIRE
CALCUTTA, INDIA.
NOVEMBER 10, 1945
THIS IS NO WHIM, HARRY, BUT VERY SERIOUS INDEED. YOU DID NOBLY. SIMILAR CASE IN PRETORIA. GENERAL HOSPITAL, DR. FELIX VANOTT. WE HAVE MADE ALL ARRANGEMENTS WITH AIR TRANSPORT.

JEAN ARBALAID

By Airmail

Pretoria, Union of South Africa
November 15, 1945

Mrs. Jean Arbalaid
Washington, D. C.

My dear sister:

You are evidently a very big wheel, you and your husband, and I wish I knew what your current silly season adds up to. I suppose in due time you'll see fit to tell me. But in any case, your priorities command respect. A full colonel was bumped, and I was promptly whisked to South Africa, a beautiful country of pleasant climate and, I am sure, great promise.

I saw the child, who is still being kept in the General Hospital here, and I spent an evening with Dr. Vanott and a young and reasonably attractive Quaker lady, Miss Gloria Oland, an anthropologist working among the Bantu people for her Doctorate. So, you see, I will be able to provide a certain amount of background material—more as I develop my acquaintance with Miss Oland.

Superficially, this case is remarkably like the incident in Assam. There it was a girl of fourteen; here we have a Bantu boy of eleven. The girl was reared by the wolves; the boy, in this case, was reared by the baboons—and rescued from them by a White Hunter, name of Archway, strong, silent type, right out of Hemingway. Unfortunately, Archway has a nasty temper and doesn't like children, so when the boy understandably bit him, he whipped the child to within an inch of its life. "Tamed him," as he puts it.

At the hospital, however, the child has been receiving the best of care and reasonable if scientific affection. There is no way of tracing him back to his parents, for these Basutoland baboons are great travellers and there is no telling where they picked him up. His age is a medical guess, but reasonable. That he is of Bantu origin, there is no doubt. He is handsome, long-

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limbed, exceedingly strong, and with no indication of any cranial injury. But like the girl in Assam, he is—in our terms—an idiot and an imbecile.

That is to say, he is a baboon. His vocalization is that of a baboon. He differs from the girl in that he is able to use his hands to hold things and to examine things, and he has a more active curiosity; but that, I am assured by Miss Oland, is the difference between a wolf and a baboon.

He too has a permanent curvature of the spine; he goes on all fours as the baboons do, and the back of his fingers and hands are heavily callused. After tearing off his clothes the first time, he accepted them, but that too is a baboon trait. In this case, Miss Oland has hope for his learning at least rudimentary speech, but Dr. Vanott doubts that he ever will. Incidently, I must take note that in those eighteen cases Professor Gojee referred to, there was no incidence of human speech being learned beyond its most basic elements.

So goes my childhood hero, Tarzan of the Apes, and all the noble beasts along with him. But the most terrifying thought is this—what is the substance of man himself, if this can happen to him? The learned folk here have been trying to explain to me that man is a creature of his thought and that his thought is to a very large extent shaped by his environment; and that this thought process—or mentation as they call it—is based on words. Without words, thought becomes a process of pictures, which is on the animal level and rules out all, even the most primitive, abstract concepts. In other words, man cannot become man by himself: he is the result of other men and of the totality of human society and experience.

The man raised by the wolves is a wolf, by the baboons a baboon—and this is implacable, isn't it? My head has been swimming with all sorts of notions, some of them not at all pleasant. My dear sister, what are you and your husband up to? Isn't it time you broke down and told old Harry? Or do you want me to pop off to Tibet? Anything to please you, but preferably something that adds up.

Your ever-loving Harry

By Airmail

Washington, D. C.
November 27, 1945

Mr. Harry Felton
Pretoria, Union of South Africa.

Dear Harry:

You are a noble and sweet brother, and quite sharp too. You are also a dear. Mark and I want you to do a job for us, which will enable you to run here and there across the face of the earth, and be paid for it too. In order to convince you, we must spill out the dark secrets of

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our work—which we have decided to do, considering you an upright and trustworthy character. But the mail, it would seem, is less trustworthy; and since we are working with the Army, which has a constitutional dedication to *top-secret* and similar nonsense, the information goes to you via diplomatic pouch. As of receiving this, consider yourself employed; your expenses will be paid, within reason, and an additional eight thousand a year for less work than indulgence.

So please stay put at your hotel in Pretoria until the pouch arrives. Not more than ten days. Of course, you will be notified.

Love, affection and respect,
Jean

By diplomatic pouch

Washington, D. C.
December 5, 1945

Mr. Harry Felton
Pretoria, Union of South Africa.

Dear Harry:

Consider this letter the joint effort of Mark and myself. The conclusions are also shared. Also, consider it a very serious document indeed.

You know that for the past twenty years, we have both been deeply concerned with child psychology and child development. There is no need to review our careers or our experience in the Public Health Service. Our work during the war, as part of the Child Reclamation Program, led to an interesting theory, which we decided to pursue. We were given leave by the head of the service to make this our own project, and recently we were granted a substantial amount of army funds to work with.

Now down to the theory, which is not entirely untested, as you know. Briefly—but with two decades of practical work as a background—it is this: Mark and I have come to the conclusion that within the rank and file of Homo Sapiens is the leavening of a new race. Call them man-plus—call them what you will. They are not of recent arrival; they have been cropping up for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. But they are trapped in and moulded by human environment as certainly and implacably as your Assamese girl was trapped among the wolves or your Bantu boy among the baboons.

By the way, your two cases are not the only attested ones we have. By sworn witness, we have records of seven similar cases, one in Russia, two in Canada, two in South America, one in West Africa, and, just to cut us down to size, one in the United States. We also have hearsay and folklore of three hundred and eleven parallel cases over a period of fourteen centuries. We have in fourteenth century Germany, in the folio MS of the

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monk, Hubercus, five case-histories which he claims to have observed. In all of these cases, in the seven cases witnessed by people alive today, and in all but sixteen of the hearsay cases, the result is more or less precisely what you have seen and described yourself: the child reared by the wolf is a wolf.

Our own work adds up to the parallel conclusion: the child reared by a man is a man. If man-plus exists, he is trapped and caged as certainly as any human child reared by animals. Our proposition is that he exists.

Why do we think this superchild exists? Well, there are many reasons, and neither the time nor the space to go into all in detail. But here are two very telling reasons. Firstly, we have case histories of several hundred men and women, who as children had IQs of 150 or above. In spite of their enormous intellectual promise as children, less than ten percent have succeeded in their chosen careers. Roughly another ten percent have been institutionalized as mental cases beyond recovery. About fourteen percent have had or require therapy in terms of mental health problems. Six percent have been suicides, one percent are in prison, twenty-seven percent have had one or more divorces, nineteen percent are chronic failures at whatever they attempt—and the rest are undistinguished in any important manner. All of the IQs have dwindled—almost in the sense of a smooth graph line in relation to age.

Since society has never provided the full potential for such a mentality, we are uncertain as to what it might be. But we can guess that against it, they have been reduced to a sort of idiocy—an idiocy that we call normalcy.

The second reason we put forward is this: we know that man uses only a tiny fraction of his brain. What blocks him from the rest of it? Why has nature given him equipment that he cannot put to use? Or has society prevented him from breaking the barriers around his own potential?

There, in brief, are two reasons. Believe me, Harry, there are many more—enough for us to have convinced some very hard-headed and unimaginative government people that we deserve a chance to release *superman.* Of course, history helps—in its own mean manner. It would appear that we are beginning another war—with Russia this time, a cold war, as some have already taken to calling it. And among other things, it will be a war of intelligence—a commodity in rather short supply, as some of our local mental giants have been frank enough to admit. They look upon our man-plus as a secret weapon, little devils who will come up with death rays and super-atom-bombs when the time is ripe.

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Well, let them. It is inconceivable to imagine a project like this under benign sponsorship. The important thing is that Mark and I have been placed in full charge of the venture—millions of dollars, top priority—the whole works. But nevertheless, *secret to the ultimate.* I cannot stress this enough.

Now, as to your own job—if you want it. It develops step by step. First step: in Berlin, in 1937, there was a Professor Hans Goldbaum. Half Jewish. The head of the *Institute for Child Therapy.* He published a small monograph on intelligence testing in children, and he put forward claims—which we are inclined to believe—that he could determine a child's IQ during its first year of life, in its pre-speech period. He presented some impressive tables of estimations and subsequent checked results, but we do not know enough of his method to practice it ourselves. In other words, we need the professor's help.

In 1937, he vanished from Berlin. In 1943, he was reported to be living in Cape Town—the last address we have for him. I enclose the address. Go to Cape Town, Harry darling. (Myself talking, not Mark.) If he has left, follow him and find him. If he is dead, inform us immediately.

Of course you will take the job. We love you and we need your help.

Jean

By airmail

Cape Town, South Africa
December 20, 1945

Mrs. Jean Arbalaid
Washington, D. C.

My dear sister:

Of all the hairbrained ideas! If this is our secret weapon, I am prepared to throw in the sponge right now. But a job is a job.

It took me a week to follow the Professor's meandering through Cape Town—only to find out that he took off for London in 1944. Evidently, they needed him there. I am off to London

Love, Harry

By diplomatic pouch

Washington, D. C.
December 26, 1945

Mr. Harry Felton
London, England

Dear Harry:

This is dead serious. By now, you must have found the professor. We believe that despite protestations of your own idiocy, you have enough sense to gauge his method. Sell him this venture. Sell him! We will give him whatever he asks—and we want him to work with us as long as he will.

Briefly, here is what we are up to. We have been allocated a tract of eight thousand acres in Northern California. We intend to establish an environment there —under military guard and secur-

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ity. In the beginning, the outside world will be entirely excluded. The environment will be controlled and exclusive.

Within this environment, we intend to bring forty children to maturity—to a maturity that will result in man-plus.

As to the details of this environment—well that can wait. The immediate problem is the children. Out of forty, ten will be found in the United States; the other thirty will be found by the professor and yourself—outside of the United States.

Half are to be boys; we want an even boy-girl balance. They are to be between the ages of six months and nine months, and all are to show indications of an exceedingly high IQ—that is, if the professor's method is any good at all.

We want five racial groupings: Caucasian, Indian, Chinese, Malayan and Bantu. Of course, we are sensible of the vagueness of these groupings, and you have some latitude within them. The six so-called *Caucasian* infants are to be found in Europe. We might suggest two northern types, two Central European types, and two Mediterranean types. A similar breakdown might be followed in other areas.

Now understand this—no cops and robbers stuff, no OSS, no kidnapping. Unfortunately, the world abounds in war orphans—and in parents poor and desperate enough to sell their children. When you want a child and such a situation arises, buy! Price is no object. I will have no maudlin sentimentality or scruples. These children will be loved and cherished—and if you should acquire any by purchase, you will be giving a child life and hope.

When you find a child, inform us immediately. Air transport will be at your disposal—and we are making all arrangements for wet nurses and other details of child care. We shall also have medical aid at your immediate disposal. On the other hand, we want healthy children—within the general conditions of health within any given area.

Now good luck to you. We are depending on you and we love you. And a merry Christmas.

Jean

By diplomatic pouch

Copenhagen, Denmark
February 4, 1946

Mrs. Jean Arbalaid
Washington, D. C.

Dear Jean:

I seem to have caught your silly *top-secret* and *classified* disease, and I have been waiting for a free day and a diplomatic pouch to sum up my various adventures. From my "guarded" cables, you know that the professor and I have been doing a Cook's Tour of the baby market. My dear sister, this kind of shopping spree does not sit

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at all well with me. However, I gave my word, and there you are. I will complete and deliver.

By the way, I suppose I continue to send these along to Washington, even though your "environment," as you call it, has been established. I'll do so until otherwise instructed.

There was no great difficulty in finding the professor. Being in uniform—I have since acquired an excellent British wardrobe—and having all the fancy credentials you were kind enough to supply, I went to the War Office. As they say, every courtesy was shown to Major Harry Felton, but I feel better in civilian clothes. Anyway, the professor had been working with a child reclamation project, living among the ruins of the East End, which is pretty badly shattered. He is an astonishing little man, and I have become quite fond of him. On his part, he is learning to tolerate me.

I took him to dinner—you were the lever that moved him, my dear sister. I had no idea how famous you are in certain circles. He looked at me in awe, simply because we share a mother and father.

Then I said my piece, all of it, no holds barred. I had expected your reputation to crumble into dust there on the spot, but no such thing. Goldbaum listened with his mouth and his ears and every fibre of his being. The only time he interrupted me was to question me on the Assamese girl and the Bantu boy; and very pointed and meticulous questions they were. When I had finished, he simply shook his head—not in disagreement but with sheer excitement and delight. I then asked him what his reaction to all this was.

"I need time," he said. "This is something to digest. But the concept is wonderful—daring and wonderful. Not that the reasoning behind it is so novel. I have thought of this—so many anthropologists have. But to put it into practice, young man—ah, your sister is a wonderful and remarkable woman!"

There you are, my sister. I struck while the iron was hot, and told him then and there that you wanted and needed his help, first to find the children and then to work in the environment.

"The environment," he said; "you understand that is everything, everything. But how can she change the environment? The environment is total, the whole fabric of human society, self-deluded and superstitious and sick and irrational and clinging to legends and phantasies and ghosts. Who can change that?"

So it went. My anthropology is passable at best, but I have read all your books. If my answers were weak in that department, he did manage to draw out of me a more or less complete picture of Mark

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and yourself. He then said he would think about the whole matter. We made an appointment for the following day, when he would explain his method of intelligence determination in infants.

We met the next day, and he explained his methods. He made a great point of the fact that he did not test but rather determined, within a wide margin for error. Years before, in Germany, he had worked out a list of fifty characteristics which he noted in infants. As these infants matured, they were tested regularly by normal methods—and the results were checked against his original observations. Thereby, he began to draw certain conclusions, which he tested again and again over the next fifteen years. I am enclosing an unpublished article of his which goes into greater detail. Sufficient to say that he convinced me of the validity of his methods. Subsequently, I watched him examine a hundred and four British infants —to come up with our first choice. Jean, this is a remarkable and brilliant man.

On the third day after I had met him, he agreed to join the project. But he said this to me, very gravely, and afterwards I put it down exactly as he said it:

"You must tell your sister that I have not come to this decision lightly. We are tampering with human souls—and perhaps even with human destiny. This experiment may fail, but if it succeeds it can be the most important event of our time—even more important and consequential than this war we have just fought. And you must tell her something else. I had a wife and three children, and they were put to death because a nation of men turned into beasts. I watched that, and I could not have lived through it unless I believed, always, that what can turn into a beast can also turn into a man. We are neither. But if we go to create man, we must be humble. We are the tool, not the craftsman, and if we succeed, we will be less than the result of our work."

There is your man, Jean, and as I said, a good deal of a man. Those words are verbatim. He also dwells a great deal on the question of environment, and the wisdom and judgement and love necessary to create this environment. I think it would be helpful if you could send me a few words at least concerning this environment you are establishing.

We have now sent you four infants. Tomorrow, we leave for Rome—and from Rome to Casablanca.

But we will be in Rome at least two weeks, and a communication should reach me there.

More seriously—

And not untroubled,

Harry

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By diplomatic pouch
Via Washington, D. C.
February 11, 1946

Mr. Harry Felton
Rome, Italy

Dear Harry:

Just a few facts here. We are tremendously impressed by your reactions to Professor Goldbaum, and we look forward eagerly to his joining us. Meanwhile, Mark and I have been working night and day on the environment. In the most general terms, this is what we plan.

The entire reservation—all eight thousand acres—will be surrounded by a wire fence and will be under army guard. Within it, we shall establish a home. There will be between thirty and forty teachers—or group parents. We are accepting only married couples who love children and who will dedicate themselves to this venture. That they must have additional qualifications goes without saying.

Within the proposition that somewhere in man's civilized development, something went wrong, we are returning to the prehistory form of group marriage. That is not to say that we will cohabit indiscriminately—but the children will be given to understand that parentage is a whole, that we are all their mothers and fathers, not by blood but by love.

We shall teach them the truth, and where we do not know the truth, we shall not teach. There will be no myths, no legends, no lies, supersititions, no premises and no religions. We shall teach love and cooperation and we shall give love and security in full measure. We shall also teach them the knowledge of mankind.

During the first nine years, we shall command the environment entirely. We shall write the books they read, and shape the history and circumstances they require. Only then, will we begin to relate the children to the world as it is.

Does it sound too simple or too presumptuous? It is all we can do, Harry, and I think Professor Goldbaum will understand that full well. It is also more than has ever been done for children before.

So good luck to both of you. Your letters sound as if you are changing, Harry—and we feel a curious process of change within us. When I put down what we are doing, it seems almost too obvious to be meaningful. We are simply taking a group of very gifted children and giving them knowledge and love. Is this enough to break through to that part of man which is unused and unknown? Well, we shall see. Bring us the children, Harry, and we shall see.

With love,
Jean

In the early spring of 1965, Harry Felton arrived in Washing-

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ton and went directly to the White House. Felton had just turned fifty; he was a tall and pleasant-looking man, rather lean, with greying hair. As President of the Board of Shipways, Inc.—one of the largest import and export houses in America—he commanded a certain amount of deference and respect from Eggerton, who was then Secretary of Defense. In any case, Eggerton, who was nobody's fool, did not make the mistake of trying to intimidate Felton.

Instead, he greeted him pleasantly; and the two of them, with no others present, sat down in a small room in the White House, drank each other's good health, and talked about things.

Eggerton proposed that Felton might know why he had been asked to Washington.

"I can't say that I do know," Felton said.

"You have a remarkable sister."

"I have been aware of that for a long time," Felton smiled.

"You are also very close-mouthed, Mr. Felton," the secretary observed. "So far as we know, not even your immediate family has ever heard of man-plus. That's a commendable trait."

"Possibly and possibly not. It's been a long time."

"Has it? Then you haven't heard from your sister lately?"

"Almost a year," Felton answered.

"It didn't alarm you?"

"Should it? No, it didn't alarm me. My sister and I are very close, but this project of hers is not the sort of thing that allows for social relations. There have been long periods before when I have not heard from her. We are poor letter writers."

"I see," nodded Eggerton.

"I am to conclude that she is the reason for my visit here?"

"Yes."

"She's well?"

"As far as we know," Eggerton said quietly.

"Then what can I do for you?"

"Help us, if you will," Eggerton said, just as quietly. "I am going to tell you what has happened, Mr. Felton, and then perhaps you can help us."

"Perhaps," Felton agreed.

"About the project, you know as much as any of us, more perhaps, since you were in at the inception. So you realize that such a project must be taken very seriously or laughed off entirely. To date, it has cost the government eleven million dollars, and that is not something you laugh off. Now you understand that the unique part of this project was its exclusiveness. That word is used advisedly and specifically. Its success depended upon the creation of a unique and exclusive environment, and in terms of that environment, we agreed not to send any observers into the reservation for a period of fifteen years. Of course, during

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those fifteen years, there have been many conferences with Mr. and Mrs. Arbalaid and with certain of their associates, including Dr. Goldbaum.

"But out of these conferences, there was no progress report that dealt with anything more than general progress. We were given to understand that the results were rewarding and exciting, but very little more. We honored our part of the agreement, and at the end of the fifteen year period, we told your sister and her husband that we would have to send in a team of observers. They pleaded for an extension of time—maintaining that it was critical to the success of the entire program—and they pleaded persuasively enough to win a three year extension. Some months ago, the three year period was over. Mrs. Arbalaid came to Washington and begged a further extension. When we refused, she agreed that our team could come into the reservation in ten days. Then she returned to California."

Eggerton paused and looked at Felton searchingly.

"And what did you find?" Felton asked.

"You don't know?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Well—" the secretary said slowly, "I feel like a damn fool when I think of this, and also a little afraid. When I say it, the fool end predominates. We went there and we found nothing."

"Oh?"

"You don't appear too surprised, Mr. Felton?"

"Nothing my sister does has ever really surprised me. You mean the reservation was empty—no sign of anything?"

"I don't mean that, Mr. Felton. I wish I did mean that. I wish it was so pleasantly human and down to earth. I wish we thought that your sister and her husband were two clever and unscrupulous swindlers who had taken the government for eleven million. That would warm the cockles of our hearts compared to what we do have. You see, we don't know whether the reservation is empty or not, Mr. Felton, because the reservation is not there."

"What?"

"Precisely. The reservation is not there."

"Come now," Felton smiled. "My sister is a remarkable woman, but she doesn't make off with eight thousand acres of land. It isn't like her."

"I don't find your humor entertaining, Mr. Felton."

"No. No, of course not. I'm sorry. Only when a thing makes no sense at all—how could an eight-thousand-acre stretch of land not be where it was? Doesn't it leave a large hole?"

"If the newspapers get hold of it, they could do even better than that, Mr. Felton."

"Why not explain," Felton said.

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"Let me try to—not to explain but to describe. This stretch of land is in the Fulton National Forest, rolling country, some hills, a good stand of redwood—a kidney-shaped area. It was wire-fenced, with army guards at every approach. I went there with our inspection team, General Meyers, two army physicians, Gorman, the psychiatrist, Senator Totenwell of the Armed Services Committee, and Lydia Gentry, the educator. We crossed the country by 'plane and drove the final sixty miles to the reservation in two government cars. A dirt road leads into it. The guard on this road halted us. The reservation was directly before us. As the guard approached the first car, the reservation disappeared."

"Just like that?" Felton whispered. "No noise—no explosion?"

"No noise, no explosion. One moment, a forest of redwoods in front of us—then a gray area of nothing."

"Nothing? That's just a word. Did you try to go in?"

"Yes—we tried. The best scientists in America have tried. I myself am not a very brave man, Mr. Felton, but I got up enough courage to walk up to this gray edge and touch it. It was very cold and very hard—so cold that it blistered these three fingers."

He held out his hand for Felton to see.

"I became afraid then. I have not stopped being afraid." Felton nodded. "Fear—such fear," Eggerton sighed.

"I need not ask you if you tried this or that?"

"We tried everything, Mr. Felton, even—I am ashamed to say—a very small atomic bomb. We tried the sensible things and the foolish things. We went into panic and out of panic, and we tried everything."

"Yet you've kept it secret?"

"So far, Mr. Felton."

"Airplanes?"

"You see nothing from above. It looks like mist lying in the valley."

"What do your people think it is?"

Eggerton smiled and shook his head. "They don't know. There you are. At first, some of them thought it was some kind of force field. But the mathematics won't work, and of course it's cold. Terribly cold. I am mumbling. I am not a scientist and not a mathematician, but they also mumble, Mr. Felton. I am tired of that kind of thing. That is why I asked you to come to Washington and talk with us. I thought you might know."

"I might," Felton nodded.

For the first time, Eggerton became alive, excited, impatient. He mixed Felton another drink. Then he leaned forward eagerly and waited. Felton took a letter out of his pocket.

"This came from my sister," he said.

"You told me you had no letter from her in almost a year!"

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"I've had this almost a year," Felton replied, a note of sadness in his voice. "I haven't opened it. She enclosed this sealed envelope with a short letter, which only said that she was well and quite happy, and that I was to open and read the other letter when it was absolutely necessary to do so. My sister is like that; we think the same way. Now, I suppose it's necessary, don't you?"

The secretary nodded slowly but said nothing. Felton opened the letter and began to read aloud.

June 12, 1964

My dear Harry:

As I write this, it is twenty-two years since I have seen you or spoken to you. How very long for two people who have such love and regard for each other as we do! And now that you have found it necessary to open this letter and read it, we must face the fact that in all probability we will never see each other again. I hear that you have a wife and three children—all wonderful people. I think it is hardest to know that I will not see them or know them.

Only this saddens me. Otherwise, Mark and I are very happy—and I think you will understand why.

About the barrier—which now exists or you would not have opened the letter—tell them that there is no harm to it and no one will be hurt by it. It cannot be broken into because it is a negative power rather than a positive one, an absence instead of a presence. I will have more to say about it later, but possibly explain it no better. Some of the children could likely put it into intelligible words, but I want this to be my report, not theirs.

Strange that I still call them children and think of them as children—when in all fact we are the children and they are adults. But they still have the quality of children that we know best, the strange innocence and purity that vanishes so quickly in the outside world.

And now I must tell you what came of our experiment—or some of it. Some of it, for how could I ever put down the story of the strangest two decades that men ever lived through? It is all incredible and it is all commonplace. We took a group of wonderful children, and we gave them an abundance of love, security and truth—but I think it was the factor of love that mattered most. During the first year, we weeded out each couple that showed less than a desire to love these children. They were easy to love. And as the years passed, they became our children—in every way. The children who were born to the couples in residence here simply joined the group. No one had *a father* or *a mother;* we were a living functioning group in which all

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men were the fathers of all children and all women the mothers of all children.

No, this was not easy, Harry—among ourselves, the adults, we had to fight and work and examine and turn ourselves inside out again and again, and tear our guts and hearts out, so that we could present an environment that had never been before, a quality of sanity and truth and security that exists nowhere else in all this world.

How shall I tell you of an American Indian boy, five years old, composing a splendid symphony? Or of the two children, one Bantu, one Italian, one a boy, one a girl, who at the age of six built a machine to measure the speed of light? Will you believe that we, the adults, sat quietly and listened to these six year olds explain to us that since the speed of light is a constant everywhere, regardless of the motion of material bodies, the distance between the stars cannot be mentioned in terms of light, since that is not distance on our plane of being? Then believe also that I put it poorly. In all of these matters, I have the sensations of an uneducated immigrant whose child is exposed to all the wonders of school and knowledge. I understand a little, but very little.

If I were to repeat instance after instance, wonder after wonder—at the age of six and seven and eight and nine, would you think of the poor, tortured, nervous creatures whose parents boast that they have an IQ of 160, and in the same breath bemoan the fate that did not give them normal children? Well, ours were and are *normal* children. Perhaps the first normal children this world has seen in a long time. If you heard them laugh or sing only once, you would know that. If you could see how tall and strong they are, how fine of body and movement. They have a quality that I have never seen in children before.

Yes, I suppose, dear Harry, that much about them would shock you. Most of the time, they wear no clothes. Sex has always been a joy and a good thing to them, and they face it and enjoy it as naturally as we eat and drink—more naturally, for we have no gluttons in sex or food, no ulcers of the belly or the soul. They kiss and caress each other and do many other things that the world has specified as shocking, nasty, etc.—but whatever they do, they do with grace and joy. Is all this possible? I tell you that it has been my life for almost twenty years now. I live with boys and girls who are without evil or sickness, who are like pagans or gods—however you would look at it.

But the story of the children and of their day-to-day life is one that will be told properly and in its own time and place. All the indications I have put down here add up only to great gifts and abilities.

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Mark and I never had any doubts about these results; we knew that if we controlled an environment that was predicated on the future, the children would learn more than any children do on the outside. In their seventh year of life they were dealing easily and naturally with scientific problems normally taught on the college level, or higher, outside. This was to be expected, and we would have been very disappointed if something of this sort had not developed. But it was the unexpected that we hoped for and watched for—the flowering of the mind of man that is blocked in every single human being on the outside.

And it came. Originally, it began with a Chinese child in the fifth year of our work. The second was an American child, then a Burmese. Most strangely, it was not thought of as anything very unusual, nor did we realize what was happening until the seventh year, when there were already five of them.

Mark and I were taking a walk that day—I remember it so well, a lovely, cool and clear California day—when we came on a group of children in a meadow. There were about a dozen children there. Five of them sat in a little circle, with a sixth in the center of the circle. Their heads were almost touching. They were full of little giggles, ripples of mirth and satisfaction. The rest of the children sat in a group about ten feet away—watching intently.

As we came to the scene, the children in the second group put their fingers to their lips, indicating that we should be quiet. So we stood and watched without speaking. After we were there about ten minutes, the little girl in the center of the circle of five, leaped to her feet, crying ecstatically.

"I heard you! I heard you! I heard you!"

There was a kind of achievement and delight in her voice that we had not heard before, not even from our children. Then all of the children there rushed together to kiss her and embrace her, and they did a sort of dance of play and delight around her. All this we watched with no indication of surprise or even very great curiosity. For even though this was the first time anything like this—beyond our guesses or comprehension—had ever happened, we had worked out our own reaction to it.

When the children rushed to us for our congratulations, we nodded and smiled and agreed that it was all very wonderful. "Now, it's my turn, mother," a Senegalese boy told me. "I can almost do it already. Now there are six to help me, and it will be easier."

"Aren't you proud of us?" another cried.

We agreed that we were very proud, and we skirted the rest of the questions. Then, at our staff

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meeting that evening, Mark described what had happened.

"I noticed that last week," Mary Hengel, our semantics teacher nodded. "I watched them, but they didn't see me."

"How many were there?" Professor Goldbaum asked intently.

"Three. A fourth in the center —their heads together. I thought it was one of their games and I walked away."

"They make no secret of it," someone observed.

"Yes," I said, "they took it for granted that we knew what they were doing."

"No one spoke," Mark said. "I can vouch for that."

"Yet they were listening," I said. "They giggled and laughed as if some great joke was taking place— or the way children laugh about a game that delights them."

It was Dr. Goldbaum who put his finger on it. He said, very gravely, "Do you know, Jean— you always said that we might open that great area of the mind that is closed and blocked in us. I think that they have opened it. I think they are teaching and learning to listen to thoughts."

There was a silence after that, and then Atwater, one of our psychologists, said uneasily, "I don't think I believe it. I've investigated every test and report on telepathy ever published in this country— the Duke stuff and all the rest of it. We know how tiny and feeble brain waves are—it is fantastic to imagine that they can be a means of communication."

"There is also a statistical factor," Rhoda Lannon, a mathematician, observed. "If this faculty existed even as a potential in mankind, is it conceivable that there would be no recorded instance of it?"

"Maybe it has been recorded," said Fleming, one of our historians. "Can you take all the whippings, burnings and hangings of history and determine which were telepaths?"

"I think I agree with Dr. Goldbaum," Mark said. "The children are becoming telepaths. I am not moved by a historical argument, or by a statistical argument, because our obsession here is environment. There is no record in history of a similar group of unusual children being raised in such an environment. Also, this may be—and probably is—a faculty which must be released in childhood or remain permanently blocked. I believe Dr. Haenigson will bear me out when I say that mental blocks imposed during childhood are not uncommon."

"More than that." Dr. Heenigson, our chief psychiatrist, nodded. "No child in our society escapes the need to erect some mental block in his mind. Whole areas of every human being's mind are blocked in early childhood. This is an absolute of human society."

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Dr. Goldbaum was looking at us strangely. I was going to say something—but I stopped. I waited and Dr. Goldbaum said:

"I wonder whether we have begun to realize what we may have done. What is a human being? He is the sum of his memories, which are locked in his brain, and every moment of experience simply builds up the structure of those memories. We don't know as yet what is the extent or power of the gift these children of ours appear to be developing, but suppose they reach a point where they can share the totality of memory? It is not simply that among themselves there can be no lies, no deceit, no rationalization, no secrets, no guilts —it is more than that."

Then he looked from face to face, around the whole circle of our staff. We were beginning to comprehend him. I remember my own reactions at that moment, a sense of wonder and discovery and joy and heartbreak too; a feeling so poignant that it brought tears to my eyes.

"You know, I see," Dr. Goldbaum nodded. "Perhaps it would be best for me to speak about it. I am much older than any of you—and I have been through, lived through the worst years of horrror and bestiality that mankind ever knew. When I saw what I saw, I asked myself a thousand times; What is the meaning of mankind —if it has any meaning at all, if it is not simply a haphazard accident, an unusual complexity of molecular structure? I know you have all asked yourselves the same thing. Who are we? What are we destined for? What is our purpose? Where is sanity or reason in these bits of struggling, clawing, sick flesh? We kill, we torture, we hurt and destroy as no other species does. We ennoble murder and falsehood and hypocrisy and superstition; we destroy our own body with drugs and poisonous food; we deceive ourselves as well as others—and we hate and hate and hate.

"Now something has happened. If these children can go into each other's minds completely—then they will have a single memory, which is the memory of all of them. All experience will be common to all of them, all knowledge, all dreams—and they will be immortal. For as one dies, another child is linked to the whole, and another and another. Death will lose all meaning, all of its dark horror. Mankind will begin, here in this place, to fulfill a part of its intended destiny—to become a single, wonderful unit, a whole—almost in the old words of your poet, John Donne, who sensed what we have all sensed at one time, that no man is an island unto himself. Has any thoughtful man lived without having a sense of that singleness of mankind? I don't think so. We have been living

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in darkness, in the night, struggling each of us with his own poor brain and then dying with all the memories of a liftime. It is no wonder that we have achieved so little. The wonder is that we have achieved so much. Yet all that we know, all that we have done will be nothing compared to what these children will know and do and create—"

So the old man spelled it out, Harry—and saw almost all of it from the beginning. That was the beginning. Within the next twelve months, each one of our children was linked to all of the others telepathically. And in the years that followed, every child born in our reservation was shown the way into that linkage by the children. Only we, the adults, were forever barred from joining it. We were of the old, they of the new; their way was closed to us forever—although they could go into our minds, and did. But never could we feel them there or see them there, as they did each other.

I don't know how to tell you of the years that followed, Harry. In our little, guarded reservation, man became what he was always destined to be, but I can explain it only imperfectly. I can hardly comprehend, much less explain, what it means to inhabit forty bodies simultaneously, or what it means to each of the children to have the other personalities within them, a part of them—what it means to live as man and woman always and together. Could the children explain it to us? Hardly, for this is a transformation that must take place, from all we can learn, before puberty—and as it happens, the children accept it as normal and natural—indeed as the most natural thing in the world. We were the unnatural ones—and one thing they never truly comprehended is how we could bear to live in our aloneness, how we could bear to live with the knowledge of death as extinction.

We are happy that this knowledge of us did not come at once. In the beginning, the children could merge their thoughts only when their heads were almost touching. Bit by bit, their command of distance grew—but not until they were in their fifteenth year did they have the power to reach out and probe with their thoughts anywhere on earth. We thank God for this. By then the children were ready for what they found. Earlier, it might have destroyed them.

I must mention that two of our children met accidental death—in the ninth and the eleventh year. But it made no difference to the others, a little regret, but no grief, no sense of great loss, no tears or weeping. Death is totally different to them than to us; a loss of flesh; the personality itself is immortal and lives consciously

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in the others. When we spoke of a marked grave or a tombstone, they smiled and said that we could make it if it would give us any comfort. Yet later, when Dr. Goldbaum died, their grief was deep and terrible, for his was the old kind of death.

Outwardly, they remained individuals—each with his or her own set of characteristics, mannerisms, personality. The boys and the girls make love in a normal sexual manner—though all of them share the experience. Can you comprehend that? I cannot—but for them everything is different. Only the unspoiled devotion of mother for helpless child can approximate the love that binds them together—yet here it is also different, deeper even than that.

Before the transformation took place, there was sufficient of children's petulance and anger and annoyance—but after it took place, we never again heard a voice raised in anger or annoyance. As they themselves put it, when there was trouble among them, they washed it out—when there was sickness, they healed it; and after the ninth year, there was no more sickness—even three or four of them, when they merged their minds, could go into a body and cure it.

I use these words and phrases because I have no others, but they don't describe. Even after all these years of living with the children, day and night, I can only vaguely comprehend the manner of their existence. What they are outwardly, I know, free and healthy and happy as no men were before, but what their inner life is remains beyond me.

I spoke to one of them about it once, Arlene, a tall, lovely child whom we found in an orphanage in Idaho. She was fourteen then. We were discussing personality, and I told her that I could not understand how she could live and work as an individual, when she was also a part of so many others, and they were a part of her.

"But I remain myself, Jean. I could not stop being myself."

"But aren't the others also yourself?"

"Yes. But I am also them."

"But who controls your body?"

"I do. Of course."

"But if they should want to control it instead of you?"

"Why?"

"If you did something they disapproved of," I said lamely.

"How could I?" she asked. "Can you do something you disapprove of?"

"I am afraid I can. And do."

"I don't understand? Then why do you do it?"

So these discussions always ended. We, the adults, had only words for communication. By their tenth year, the children had developed methods of communication as far beyond words as words

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are beyond the dumb motions of animals. If one of them watched something, there was no necessity for it to be described; the others could see it through his eyes. Even in sleep, they dreamed together.

I could go on for hours attempting to describe something utterly beyond my understanding, but that would not help, would it, Harry? You will have your own problems, and I must try to make you understand what happened, what had to happen. You see, by the tenth year, the children had learned all we knew, all we had among us as material for teaching. In effect, we were teaching a single mind, a mind composed of the unblocked, unfettered talent of forty superb children; a mind so rational and pure and agile that to them we could only be objects of loving pity.

We have among us Axel Cromwell, whose name you will recognize. He is one of the greatest physicists on earth, and it was he who was mainly responsible for the first Atom bomb. After that, he came to us as one would go into a monastery—an act of personal expiation. He and his wife taught the children physics, but by the eighth year, the children were teaching Cromwell. A year later, Cromwell could follow neither their mathematics nor their reasoning; and their symbolism, of course, was out of the structure of their own thoughts.

Let me give you an example. In the far outfield of our baseball diamond, there was a boulder of perhaps ten tons. (I must remark that the athletic skill, the physical reactions of the children, was in its own way almost as extraordinary as their mental powers. They have broken every track and field record in existence—often cutting world records by one third. I have watched them run down our horses. Their movements can be so quick as to make us appear sluggards by comparison. And they love baseball—among other games.)

We had spoken of either blasting the boulder apart or rolling it out of the way with one of our heavy bulldozers, but it was something we had never gotten to. Then, one day, we discovered that the boulder was gone—in its place a pile of thick red dust that the wind was fast leveling. We asked the children what had happened, and they told us that they had reduced the boulder to dust—as if it was no more than kicking a small stone out of one's path. How? Well, they had loosened the molecular structure and it had become dust. They explained, but we could not understand. They tried to explain to Cromwell how their thoughts could do this, but he could no more comprehend it than the rest of us.

I mention one thing. They built an atomic fusion power plant, out

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of which we derive an unlimited store of power. They built what they call free fields into all our trucks and cars, so that they rise and travel through the air with the same facility they have on the ground. With the power of thought, they can go into atoms, rearrange electrons, build one element out of another—and all this is elementary to them, as if they were doing tricks to amuse us and amaze us.

So you see something of what the children are, and now I shall tell you what you must know.

In the fifteenth year of the children, our entire staff met with them. There were fifty-two of them now, for all the children born to us were taken into their body of singleness—and flourished in their company, I should add, despite their initially lower IQs. A very formal and serious meeting, for in thirty days the team of observers were scheduled to enter the reservation. Michael, who was born in Italy, spoke for them; they needed only one voice.

He began by telling us how much they loved and cherished us, the adults who were once their teachers. "All that we have, all that we are, you have given us," he said. "You are our fathers and mothers and teachers—and we love you beyond our power to say. For years now, we have wondered at your patience and self-giving, for we have gone into your minds and we know what pain and doubt and fear and confusion you all live with. We have also gone into the minds of the soldiers who guard the reservation. More and more, our power to probe grew —until now there is no mind anywhere on earth that we cannot seek out and read.

"From our seventh year, we knew all the details of this experiment, why we were here and what you were attempting—and from then until now, we have pondered over what our future must be. We have also tried to help you, whom we love so much, and perhaps we have been a little help in easing your discontents, in keeping you as healthy as possible, and in easing your troubled nights in that maze of fear and nightmare that you call sleep.

"We did what we could, but all our efforts to join you with us have failed. Unless that area of the mind is opened before puberty, the tissues change, the brain cells lose all potential of development, and it is closed forever. Of all things, this saddens us most—for you have given us the most precious heritage of mankind, and in return we have given you nothing."

"That isn't so," I said. "You have given us more than we gave you."

"Perhaps," Michael nodded. "You are very good and kind people. But now the fifteen years are

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over, and the team will be here in thirty days—"

I shook my head. "No. They must be stopped."

"And all of you?" Michael asked, looking from one to another of the adults.

Some of us were weeping. Cromwell said:

"We are your teachers and your fathers and mothers, but you must tell us what to do. You know that."

Michael nodded, and then he told us what they had decided. The reservation must be maintained. I was to go to Washington with Mark and Dr. Goldbaum—and somehow get an extension of time. Then new infants would be brought into the reservation by teams of the children, and educated here.

"But why must they be brought here?" Mark asked. "You can reach them wherever they are—go into their minds, make them a part of you?"

"But they can't reach us," Michael said. "Not for a long time. They would be alone—and their minds would be shattered. What would the people of your world outside do to such children? What happened to people in the past who were possessed of devils, who heard voices? Some became saints, but more were burned at the stake."

"Can't you protect them?" someone asked.

"Some day—yes. Now, no—there are not enough of us. First, we must help move children here, hundreds and hundreds more. Then there must be other places like this one. It will take a long time. The world is a large place and there are a great many children. And we must work carefully. You see, people are so filled with fear—and this would be the worst fear of all. They would go mad with fear and all that they would think of is to kill us."

"And our children could not fight back," Dr. Goldbaum said quietly. They cannot hurt any human being, much less kill one. Cattle, our old dogs and cats, they are one thing—"

(Here Dr. Goldbaum referred to the fact that we no longer slaughtered our cattle in the old way. We had pet dogs and cats, and when they became very old and sick, the children caused them peacefully to go to sleep—from which they never awakened. Then the children asked us if we might do the same with the cattle we butchered for food.)

"—but not people," Dr. Goldbaum went on. "They cannot hurt people or kill people. We are able to do things that we know are wrong, but that is one power we have that the children lack. They cannot kill and they cannot hurt. Am I right, Michael?"

"Yes,—you are right." Michael nodded. "We must do it slowly

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and patiently—and the world must not know what we are doing until we have taken certain measures. We think we need three years more. Can you get us three years, Jean?"

"I will get it," I said.

"And we need all of you to help us. Of course we will not keep any of you here if you wish to go. But we need you—as we have always needed you. We love you and value you, and we beg you to remain with us . . ."

Do you wonder that we all remained, Harry—that no one of us could leave our children—or will ever leave them, except when death takes us away? There is not so much more that I must tell now.

We got the three years we needed, and as for the gray barrier that surrounds us, the children tell me that it is a simple device indeed. As nearly as I can understand, they altered the time sequence of the entire reservation. Not much—by less than one ten thousandth of a second. But the result is that your world outside exists this tiny fraction of a second in the future. The same sun shines on us, the same winds blow, and from inside the barrier, we see your world unaltered. But you cannot see us. When you look at us, the present of our existence has not yet come into being—and instead there is nothing, no space, no heat, no light, only the impenetrable wall of nonexistence.

From inside, we can go outside—from the past into the future. I have done this during the moments when we experimented with the barrier. You feel a shudder, a moment of cold—but no more.

There is also a way in which

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we return, but understandably, I cannot spell it out.

So there is the situation, Harry. We will never see each other again, but I assure you that Mark and I are happier than we have ever been. Man will change, and he will become what he was intended to be, and he will reach out with love and knowledge to all the universes of the firmament. Isn't this what man has always dreamt of, no war or hatred or hunger or sickness or death? We are fortunate to be alive while this is happening, Harry—we should ask no more.

With all my love,
Jean

Felton finished reading, and then there was a long, long silence while the two men looked at each other. Finally, the Secretary spoke:

"You know we shall have to keep knocking at that barrier—trying to find a way to break through?"

"I know."

"It will be easier, now that your sister has explained it."

"I don't think it will be easier," Felton said tiredly. "I do not think that she has explained it."

"Not to you and me, perhaps. But we'll put the eggheads to work on it. They'll figure it out. They always do."

"Perhaps not this time."

"Oh, yes," the Secretary nodded. "You see, we've got to stop it. We can't have this kind of thing—immoral, godless, and a threat to every human being on earth. The kids were right. We would have to kill them, you know. It's a disease. The only way to stop a disease is to kill the bugs that cause it. The only way. I wish there was another way, but there isn't."

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"Casey Agonistes," Mr. McKenna's first story, appeared here more than a year ago, and later appeared in Judith Merril's Dell anthology of best s. f. stories. Mr. McKenna has been occupied with a serious novel of late, and his stories have been few; we are particularly grateful to have this fresh, strong example of his impressive work.

MINE OWN WAYS

by Richard McKenna

WALTER CORDICE WAS PLUMP and aging and he liked a quiet life. On what he'd thought was the last day of his last field job before retirement to New Zealand, he looked at his wife in the spy screen and was dismayed.

Life had not been at all quiet while he and Leo Brumm and Jim Andries had been building the hyperspace relay on Planet Robadur —they had their wives along and they'd had to live and work hidden under solid rock high on a high mountain. That was because the Robadurians were asymbolic and vulnerable to culture shock, and the Institute of Man, which had jurisdiction over hominid planets, forbade all contact with the natives. Even after they'd built her the lodge in a nearby peak, Martha was bored. Cordice had been glad when he and Andries had gone into Tau rapport with the communications relay unit.

That had been two months of peaceful isolation during which the unit's Tau circuits copied certain neutral patterns in the men to make itself half sentient and capable of electronic telepathy. It was good and quiet. Now they were finished, ready to seal the station and take their pre-taped escape capsule back to Earth; only anthropologists from the Institute of Man would ever visit Robadur again.

And Walter Cordice stood in the wrecked lodge and the picture on the illicit spy screen belted him with dismay.

Robadurians were not symbol users. They simply couldn't have raided the lodge. But the screen showed Martha and Willa Brumm and Allie Andries sitting bound to stakes at a forest edge. Martha's blue dress and tight red curls were

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unruffled. She sat with her stumpy legs extended primly together and her hard, plump pout said she was grimly not believing what she saw either.

Near a stream, across a green meadow starred yellow with flowers, naked and bearded Robadurians dug a pit with sharp sticks. Others piled dry branches. They were tall fellows, lump-muscled under sparse fur, with low foreheads and muzzle jaws. One, in a devil mask of twigs and feathers, seemed an overseer. Beside Martha, pert, dark little Allie Andries cried quietly. Willa was straining her white arms against the cords. They knew they were in trouble, all right.

Cordice turned from the screen, avoiding the eyes of Leo Brumm and Jim Andries. In their tan coveralls against the silver and scarlet decor they seemed as out of place as the dead Robadurian youth at their feet. Leo's chubby, pleasant face looked stricken. Jim Andries scowled. He was a big, loose-jointed man with bold angular features and black hair. They were young and junior and Cordice knew they were mutely demanding his decision.

Decision. He wouldn't retire at stat-8 now, he'd be lucky to keep stat-7. But he'd just come out of rapport and so far he was clear and the law was clear too, very clear: you minimized culture shock at whatever cost to yourself. But abandon *Martha*? He looked down at the Robadurian youth. The smooth ivory skin was free of blue hair except on the crushed skull. He felt his face burn.

"Our wives bathed him and shaved him and made him a pet?" His voice shook slightly. "Leo . . . Leo . . ."

"My fault, sir. I built 'em the spy screen and went to rescue the boy," Leo said. "I didn't want to disturb you and Jim in rapport." He was a chunky, blond young man and he was quite pale now. "They—well, I take all the blame, sir."

"The Institute of Man will fix blame," Cordice said.

My fault, he thought. For bringing Martha against my better judgment. But Leo's violation of the spy-screen ethic did lead directly to illicit contact and—*this mess!* Leo was young, they'd be lenient with him. All right, his fault. Cordice made his voice crisp.

"We minimize," he said. "Slag the lodge, get over and seal up the station, capsule home to Earth and report this."

Jim really scowled. "I love my wife, Cordice, whatever you think of yours," he said. "I'm getting Allie out of there if I have to culture shock those blue apes to death with a flame jet."

"You'll do what I say, Andries! You and your wife signed a pledge and a waiver, remember?" Cordice tried to stare him down. "The law

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says she's not worth risking the extinction of a whole species that may someday become human."

"Damn the law, she's worth it to me!" Jim said. "Cordice, those blue apes are human now. How else could they raid up here, kill this boy, carry off the women?" He spat. "We'll drop you to seal the station, keep your hands clean. Leo and I'll get the women."

Cordice dropped his eyes. Damn his insolence! Still . . . Leo could testify Andries forced it . . . he'd still be clear. . . .

"I'll go along, to ensure minimizing," he said. "Under protest—Leo, you're witness to that. But slag this lodge right now!"

Minutes later Leo hovered the flyer outside while Cordice played the flame jet on the rock face. Rock steamed, spilled away, fused and sank into a bubbling, smoking cavity. Under it the dead youth, with his smooth, muscular limbs, was only a smear of carbon. Cordice felt better.

Half an hour later, lower on the same mountain, Leo hovered the flyer above the meadow. The Robadurians all ran wildly into the forest and Jim didn't need to use the flame jet. Leo grounded and the men piled out and Cordice felt his stomach relax. They ran toward the women. Allie Andries was smiling but Martha was shouting something from an angry face. As he stooped to untie Martha the blue horde came back out of the forest. They came yelling and leaping and slashing with wet, leafy branches and the sharp smell . . .

Cordice came out of it sick with the awareness that he was tied to a stake like an animal and that it was his life, not his career, he had to save now. He feigned sleep and peered from eyecorners. Martha looked haggard and angry and he dreaded facing her. He couldn't see the others, except Allie Andries and she was smiling faintly—at Jim, no doubt.

Those two kids must escape, Cordice thought.

He must have been unconscious quite a while because sunset flamed in red and gold downvalley and the pit looked finished. It was elliptical, perhaps thirty feet long and three deep. Robadurians were still mounding black earth along the sides and others were piling brush into a circumscribed thicket, roughly triangular. They chattered, but Cordice knew it was only a mood-sharing noise. That was what made it so horrible. They were asymbolic, without speech and prior to good and evil, a natural force like falling water. He couldn't threaten, bribe or even plead. Despite his snub nose and full lips he could present an impressive face—at home on Earth. But not to such as these.

Beside the pit, the devil masker stood like a tall sentry. Abruptly

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he turned and strode toward Cordice, trailing his wooden spear. Cordice tensed and felt a scream shape itself in him. Then the devil towered lean and muscular above him. He had no little finger on his spear hand. Keen gray eyes peered down through feathers and twigs.

"Cordice, you fool, why did you bring the women?" the devil asked in fluent English. "Now all your lives are forfeit."

The scream collapsed in a grateful gasp. With speech Cordice felt armed again, almost free. But Martha spoke first.

"Men need women to inspire them and give them courage!" she said. "Walto! Tell him who you are! Make him let us go!"

Walto meant she was angry. In affection she called him *Wally Toes*. But as usual she was right. He firmed his jowls and turned a cool stat-7 stare on the devil mask.

"Look here, if you know our speech you must know we never land on a hominid planet," he said pleasantly. "There are plenty of other planets. For technical reasons we had to do a job here. It's done. We have stores and tools to leave behind." He laughed easily. "Take them and let us go. You'll never see another of us."

The devil shook his head. "It's not what we might see, it's what your women have already seen," he said. "They know a holy secret and the god Robadur demands your deaths."

Cordice paled but spoke smoothly. "I and Andries have been out of touch with the others for two months. I don't know any secret. While we were isolated Brumm built the women a spy screen and rescued that boy—"

"Who was forfeit to Robadur. Robadur eats his children."

"Arthur was being *tortured* when he broke free and ran," Martha said. "I saw *you* there!"

"On your strictly unethical spy screen."

"Why not? You're only brute animals with your *things* hanging out!"

The devil pressed his spear to her throat. "Shut up or I'll spear you now!" he said. Martha's eyes blazed defiance.

"No! *Quiet,* Martha!" Cordice choked. His front collapsed. "Brumm did it all. Kill him and let us *go!*" He twisted in his bonds.

Leo spoke from behind. "Yes, I did it. Take me and let them go." His voice was high and shaky too.

"No! Oh please, no!" That was Willa, sobbing.

"Stop that!" Jim Andries roared. "All of us or none! Listen, you behind the feathers, I know your secret. You're a renegade playing god among the asymbolics. But we're here on clearance from the Insitute of Man and they'll come looking for us. Your game's up. Let us go and you'll only be charged with causing culture shock."

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The devil grounded his spear and cocked his head. Robadurians around the pit stood up to watch. Martha shrilled into the hush.

"My own brother is with the Institute of Man!"

"I told you shut up!" The devil slapped her with his spear butt. "I know your brother. Tom Brennan would kill you himself, to keep the secret."

"*What* secret, Featherface? That you're a god?" Jim asked.

"The secret that man created himself and what man has done, man can do," the devil said. "I'm not Robadur, Andries, but I'm sealed to him from the Institute of Man. The Institute will cover for your deaths. It's done the same on hundreds of other hominid planets, to keep the secret."

"Roland Krebs! *Rollo!* You struck a lady—"

Like a snake striking the spear leaped to her throat. She strained her head back and said "Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . ." her face suddenly white and her eyes unbelieving

"Don't hurt her!" Cordice screamed. "We'll *swear* to forget, if you let us go!"

The devil withdrew his spear and laughed. "Swear on what, Cordice? Your honor? Your soul?" He spat. "What man has done, man can undo. You're the living proof!"

"We'll swear by Robadur," Cordice pleaded.

The devil looked off into the sunset. "You know, you might. You just might," he said thoughtfully. "We seal a class of boys to Light Robadur tonight; you could go with them." He turned back. "You're the leader, Andries. What about it?"

"What's it amount to?" Jim asked.

"It's a ritual that turns animals into humans," the devil said. "There are certain ordeals to eliminate the animals. If you're really men you'll be all right."

"What about the women?" Jim's voice was edgy.

"They have no souls. Robadur will hold you to account for them."

"You have great faith in Robadur," Jim said.

"Not faith, Andries, a scientist's knowledge as hard as your own," the devil said. "If you put a Robadurain into a barbering machine he wouldn't need faith to get a haircut. Well, a living ritual is a kind of psychic machine. You'll see."

"All right, we agree," Jim said. "But we'll want our wives unhurt. Understand that, Featherface?"

The devil didn't answer. He shouted and natives swarmed around the stakes. Hands untied Cordice and jerked him erect and his heart was pounding so hard he felt dizzy.

"Don't let them hurt you, Wally Toes!"

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Fleetingly in Martha's shattered face he saw the ghost of the girl he had married thirty years ago. She had a touch of the living beauty that lighted the face Allie Andries turned on Jim. Cordice said goodbye to the ghost, numb with fear.

Cordice slogged up the dark ravine like a wounded bull. He knew the priests chasing him would spear him like the hunted animal he was unless he reached sanctuary by a sacred pool somewhere ahead. Long since Jim and Leo and the terrified Robadurian youths had gone ahead of him. Stones cut his feet and thorns ripped his skin. Leo and Jim were to blame and they were young and they'd live. He was innocent and he was old and he'd die. Not fair. Let them die too. His lungs flamed with agony and at the base of a steep cascade his knees gave way.

Die here. Not fair. He heard the priests coming and his back muscles crawled with terror. Die fighting. He scrabbled in the water for a stone. Face to the spears. He cringed lower.

Jim and Leo came back down the cascade and helped him up it. "Find your guts, Cordice!" Jim said. They jerked him along, panting and swearing, until the ravine widened to make a still pool under a towering rock crowned red with the last of sunset. Twenty-odd Robadurian youths huddled whimpering on a stony slope at left. Then priests came roaring and after that Cordice took it in flashes.

He had a guardian devil, a monstrous priest with clay in white bars across his chest. White Bar and others drove him up the slope, threw him spreadeagled on his back, and staked down his wrists and ankles with wisps of grass. They placed a pebble on his chest. He tried to remember that these were symbolic restraints and that White Bar would kill him if he broke the grass or dislodged the pebble. Downslope a native boy screamed and broke his bonds and priests smashed his skull. Cordice shuddered and lay very quiet. But when they pushed the thorn through in front of his left Achilles tendon he gasped and drew up his leg. The pebble tumbled off and White Bar's club crashed down beside his head and he died.

He woke aching and cold under starlight and knew he had only fainted. White Bar sat shadowy beside him on an outcrop, club across hairy knees. Downslope the native boys sang a quavering tone song without formed words. They were mood-sharing, expressing sorrow and fearful wonder. I could almost sing with them, Cordice thought. The pebble was on his chest again and he could feel the grass at his wrists and ankles. A stone dug into his back and he shifted position very carefully so

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as not to disturb the symbols. Nearby but not in view Jim and Leo began to talk in low voices.

Damn them, Cordice thought. They'll live and I'll die. I'm dying now. Why suffer pain and indignity and die anyway? I'll just sit up and let White Bar end it for me. But first—

"Leo," he said.

"Mr. Cordice! Thank heaven! We thought—how do you feel, sir?"

"Bad. Leo—wanted to say—a fine job here. Your name's in for stat-3. Wanted to say—this all my fault. Sorry."

"No, sir," Leo said. "You were in rapport, how could you—"

"Before that. When I let Martha come and so couldn't make you juniors leave your wives behind." Cordice paused. "I owe—Martha made me, in a way, Leo."

Her pride, he thought. Her finer feelings. Her instant certainty of rightness that bolstered his own moral indecision. So she ruled him.

"I know," Leo said. "Willa's proud and ambitious for me, too."

Martha worked on Willa, Cordice thought. Hinted she could help Leo's career. So she got her spy screen. Well, he *had* been grading Leo much higher than Jim. Martha didn't like Allie's and Jim's attitude.

"I'm going to die, boys," Cordice said. "Will you forgive me?"

"No," Jim said, "You're woman-whipped to a helpless nothing, Cordice. Forgive yourself, if you can."

"Look here, Andries, I'll remember that," Cordice said.

"I'm taking Allie to a frontier planet," Jim said. "We'll never see a hairless slug like you again."

Leo murmured a protest. I'll live just to get even with Andries, Cordice thought. Damn his insolence! His heel throbbed and the stone still gouged his short ribs. He shifted carefully and it felt better. He hummed the native boys' song deep in his throat and that helped too. He began to doze. If I live I'll grow my body hair again, he thought. At least the pubic hair.

Jim's voice woke him: *Cordice! Lie quiet, now!* He opened hs eyes to hairy legs all around him and toothed beast faces in torchlight roaring a song and White Bar with club poised trembling-ready and no little finger on his right hand. The song roared over Cordice like thunder and sparks like tongues of fire rained down to sear his body. He whimpered and twitched but did not dislodge the stone on his chest. The party moved on. Downslope a boy screamed and club thuds silenced him. And again, and Cordice felt sorry for the boys.

"Damn it all, that really hurt!" Jim said.

"This was the ordeal that boy Arthur failed, only he got away,"

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Leo said. "Mrs. Cordice kept him on the screen until I could rescue him."

"How'd he act?" Jim asked.

"Trusted me, right off. Willa said he was very affectionate and they taught him all kinds of tricks. But never speech—he got wild when they tried to make him talk, Willa told me."

I'm affectionate. I know all kinds of tricks, Cordice thought. Downslope the torches went out and the priests were singing with the boys. White Bar, seated again beside Cordice on the outcrop, sang softly too. It was a new song of formed words and it disturbed Cordice. Then he heard footsteps behind his head and Jim spoke harshly.

"Hello, Featherface, we're still around," Jim said. "Mrs. Cordice called you a name. *Krebs,* wasn't it? Just who in hell are you?"

"Roland Krebs. I'm an anthropologist," the devil's voice said. "I almost married Martha once, but she began calling me *Rollio* just in time."

That guy? Cordice opened his mouth, then closed it. Damn him. He'd pretend a faint, try not to hear.

"You can't share the next phase of the ritual and it's your great loss," Krebs said. "Now each boy is learning the name that he will claim for his own in the last phase, if he survives. The men have a crude language and the boys long ago picked up the words like parrots. Now, as they sing with the priests, the words come alive in them."

"How do you mean?" Jim asked.

"Just that. The words assort together and for the first time *mean.* That's the Robadurian creation myth they're singing." Krebs lowered his voice. "They're not here now like you are, Andries. They're present in the immediacy of all their senses at the primal creation of their human world."

"Our loss? Yes . . . our great loss." Jim sounded bemused.

"Yes. For a long time words have been only a sickness in our kind," Krebs said. "But ideas can still assort and mean. Take this thought: we've found hominids on thousands of planets, but none more than barely entered on the symbol-using stage. Paleontology proves native hominids have been stuck on the threshold of evolving human minds for as long as two hundred million years. But on Earth our own symbol-using minds evolved in about three hundred thousand years."

"Does mind evolve?" Jim asked softly.

"Brain evolves, like fins change to feet," Krebs said. "The hominids can't evolve a central nervous system adequate for symbols. But on Earth, in no time at all, something worked a structural change in one animal's central nervous system greater than the gross, outward

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change from reptile to mammal."

"I'm an engineer," Jim said. "The zoologists know what worked it."

"Zoologists always felt natural selection couldn't have worked it so fast," Krebs said. "What we've learned on the hominid planets proves it can't. Natural selection might take half a billion years. *Our* fathers took a short cut."

"All right," Jim said. "All right. Our fathers were their own selective factor, in rituals like this one. They were animals and they bred themselves into men. Is that what you want *me* to say?"

"I want you to feel a little of what the boys feel now," Krebs said. "Yes. Our fathers invented ritual as an artificial extension of instinct. They invented a ritual to detect and conserve all mutations in a human direction and eliminate regressions toward the animal norm. They devised ordeals in which normal animal-instinctive behavior meant death and only those able to sin against instinct could survive to be human and father the next generation." His voice shook slightly. "Think on that, Andries! Human and animal brothers born of the same mother and the animals killed at puberty when they failed certain ordeals only human minds could bear."

"Yes. Our secret. Our *real* secret." Jim's voice shook too. "Cain killing Abel through ten thousand generations. That created *me*."

Cordice shivered and the rock gouged his short ribs.

"Dark Robadur's sin is Light Robadur's grace and the two are one," Krebs said. "You know, the Institute has made a science of myth. Dark Robadur is the species personality, instinct personified. Light Robadur is the human potential of these people. He binds Dark Robadur with symbols and coerces him with ritual. He does it in love, to make his people human."

"In love and fear and pain and death," Jim said.

"In pain and death. Those who died tonight were animals. Those who die tomorrow will be failed humans who know they die," Krebs said. "But hear their song."

"I hear it. I know how they feel and thank you for that, Krebs," Jim said. "And it's only the boys?"

"Yes, The girls will get half their chromosomes from their fathers. They will get all the effect of the selection except that portion on the peculiarly male Y-chromosome," Krebs said. "They will remain without guilt, sealed to Dark Robadur. It will make a psychic difference."

"Ah. And you Institute people *start* these rituals on the hominid planets, make them self-continuing, like kindling a fire already laid," Jim sad slowly. "Culture shock is a lie."

"It's no lie, but it does make a useful smoke screen."

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"Ah. Krebs, thank you. Krebs—" Jim lowered his voice and Cordice strained to hear. "—would you say Light Robadur might be a *transhuman* potential?"

"I hope he may go on to become so," Krebs said. "Now you know the full measure of our treason. And now I'll leave you."

His footsteps died away. Leo spoke for the first time.

"Jim, I'm scared. I don't like this. Is this ritual going to make *us* transhuman? What does that mean?"

"We can't know. Would you ask an ape what *human* means?" Jim said. "Our fathers bred themselves through a difference in kind. Then they stopped, but they didn't have to. I hope one of these hominid planets will breed on through the human to another difference in kind." He laughed. "That possibility is the secret we have to keep."

"I don't like it. I don't want to be transhuman," Leo said. "Mr. Cordice! Mr. Cordice, what do you think?"

Cordice didn't answer. Why let that damned Andries insult him again? Besides, he didn't know what to think.

"He's fainted or dead, poor fat old bastard," Jim said. "Leo, all this ritual is doing to you is forcing you to prove your human manhood, just like the boys have to. We have our manhood now only by accident of fertilization."

"I don't like it," Leo said. "That transhuman stuff. It's . . . immoral."

"It's a hundred thousand years away yet," Jim said. "But I like it. What I don't like is to think that the history of galactic life is going to head up and halt forever in the likes of old Wally Toes there."

"He's not so bad," Leo said. "I hope he's still alive."

I am, God damn you both! Cordice thought. They stopped talking.

Downslope the priest voices faded and the boys sang their worded creation song alone. White Bar went away. The sky paled above the great rock and bright planets climbed to view. Cordice felt feverish. He lapsed into a half-dream.

He saw a fanned network of golden lines. Nodes thickened to become fish, lizards and men. A voice whispered: *All life is a continuum in time. Son to father, the germ worldline runs back unbroken to the primordial ocean. For you life bowed to sex and death. For you it gasped sharp air with feeble lungs. For you it bore the pain of gravity in bones too weak to bear it. Ten thousand of your hairy fathers, each in his turn, won through this test of pain and terror to make you a man.*

Why?

I don't know why.

Are *you a man?*

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What is a man? I'm a man by definition. By natural right. By accident of fertilization. What else is a man?

Two billion years beat against you like surf, Walter Cordice. The twenty thousand fists of your hairy fathers thunder on you as a door. Open the way or be shattered.

I don't know the way. I lost the way.

Through dream mists he fled his hairy fathers. But they in him preserved intact the dry wisps that bound him terribly with the tensile strength of meaning. They steadied the pebble that crushed him under the mountain-weight of symbol. All the time he knew it.

By noon of the clouded day thirst was the greater agony. Cordice scarcely heard the popping noises made by the insects that fed on his crusted blood and serum. But he heard every plash and ripple of the priest-guarded water downslope. Heard too, once and again, the death of boys whose animal thirst overpowered their precarious new bondage to the symbol. Only those who can remember what the grass wisps *mean* survive, Cordice thought. Poor damned kids! To be able to suffer and sin against instinct is to live and be human.

Jim's and Leo's voices faded in and out of his fever dreams. His back was numb now, where the rock dug into it.

Rose of sunset crowned the great rock above the pool when White Bar prodded Cordice downslope with his club. Cordice limped and rubbed his back and every joint and muscle of his misused body ached and clamored for water. Jim and Leo looked well. Cordice scowled silence at their greetings. I'll die without their damned pity, he thought. He moved apart from them into the group of native boys standing by the rock-edged pool. Their thin lips twitched and their flat nostrils flared and snuffled at the water smell. Cordice snuffled too. He saw Krebs, still masked in twigs and feathers, come through the rank of priests and talk to Jim.

"You'll all be thrown into the water, Andries. For the boys, Dark Robadur must swim the body to the bank or they drown. Light Robadur must prevent the body from drinking or they get clubbed. The two must co-act. Understand?"

Jim nodded and Krebs turned back to the priests. These kids can't do it, Cordice thought. I can't myself. He shook the arm of the boy beside him and looked into the frightened brown eyes. *Don't drink,* he tried to say, but his throat was too gummed for speech. He smiled and nodded and pinched his lips together with his fingers. The boy smiled and pinched his own lips. Then all the boys were doing it. Cordice felt a

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strange feeling wash through him. It was like love. It was as if they were all his children.

Then wetness cooled his body and splashed his face. He dog paddled and bit his tongue to keep from gulping. White Bar jerked him up the bank again and behind him he heard the terrible cries and the club thuds. Tears stung his eyes.

Then he was limping and stumbling down the dark ravine. At steep places the native youths held his arms and helped him. They came through screening willows and he saw a fire near the brush-walled pit. The three women stood there. They looked all right. Cordice went with the boys toward the pit.

"Wally Toes! Don't let them hurt you!" Martha cried.

"Shut up!" Cordice yelled. The yell tore his gummed throat.

The boys faced outward and danced in a circle around the pit. The priests danced the opposite way in a larger circle and faced inward. There was ten feet of annular space between the rings. The priests howled and flung their arms. Cordice was very tired. His heel hurt and his back felt humped. Each time they passed, White Bar howled and pointed at him. He saw Martha every time he passed the firelit area. A priest jumped across and pulled the boy next to Cordice into the space between the rings. Cordice had to dance on away, but he heard screams and club thuds. When he came around again he saw them toss a limp body between the dancers into the pit.

They took more boys and made them kneel and did something to them. If the boys couldn't stand it, they killed them. Even if they did stand it, the priests threw them afterward into the pit. I've got to stand it, Cordice thought. If I don't, they'll kill me. Then White Bar howled and leaped and had him.

Threw him to his knees.

Held his right hand on a flat stone.

Pulled aside the little finger.

Bruising it off with a fist axe! Can't STAND it!

Outrage exploded in screaming pain. Hidden strength leaped roaring to almost-action. Then his hairy fathers came and made him be quiet and he stood it. White Bar chewed through the tendons with his teeth and when the finger was off and the stump seared with an ember the priests threw Cordice into the pit.

He felt other bodies thump beside him and his hairy fathers came very near. All around him they grinned and whispered: *You ARE a man. Your way is open.* He felt good, sure and peaceful and strong in a way he had never felt before. He wanted to hold the feeling and he tried not to hear Jim's voice calling him for fear he would lose

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it. But he had to, so he opened his eyes and got to his feet. Leo and Jim grinned at him.

"I knew you'd make it, old timer, and I'm glad," Jim said.

Cordice still had the feeling. He grinned and clasped bloody hands with his friends. All around the pit above their heads the piled brush crackled and leaped redly with flame.

Beyond the fire the priests began singing and Cordice could see them dancing in fantastic leaps. The living native boys struggled free of the dead ones and stood up. He counted fourteen. Smoke blew across the pit and the air was thick and suffocating. It was very hot and they all kept coughing and shifting and turning.

Outside the singing stopped and someone shouted a word. One native boy raised his arms and hunted back and forth along the pit edge. He went close and recoiled again.

"They called his name," Jim said. "Now he has to go through the fire to claim it. Now he has to break Dark Robadur's most holy *Thou shalt not.*"

Again the shout. Twice the boy stepped up and twice recoiled. His eyes rolled and he looked at Cordice without seeing him. His face was wild with animal fire-fear.

Leo was crying. "They can't see out there. Let's push him up," he said.

"No," Cordice said.

He felt a Presence over the pit. It was anxious and sorrowful. It was familiar and strange and expected and very right. His hairy fathers were no part of it, but they greeted it and spoke through him.

"Robadur, Robadur, give him strength to pass," Cordice prayed.

A third shout. The boy went up and through the flame in one great leap. Vast, world-lifting joy swirled and thundered through the Presence.

"Jim, do you feel it?" Cordice asked.

"I feel it," Jim said. He was crying too.

The next boy tried and fell back. He stood rigid in the silence after the third shout. It was a terrible silence. His hair was singed off and his face was blackened and his lips were skinned back over strong white teeth. His eyes stared and they were not human now and they were very sad.

"I've *got* to help him," Leo said.

Jim and Cordice held Leo back. The boy dropped suddenly to all fours. He burrowed under the dead boys who didn't have names either. Vast sorrow infolded and dropped through the Presence. Cordice wept.

Boy after boy went through. Their feet knocked a dark gap in the flaming wall. Then the voice called *Walter Cordice!*

Cordice went up and through the dark gap and the fire was almost gone there and it was easy.

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He went directly to Martha. All her bright hardness and pout was gone and she wore the ghost face. It gleamed as softly radiant as the face of little Allie Andries, who still waited for Jim. Cordice drew Martha off into the shadows and they held each other without talking in words. They watched as the others came out and then priests used long poles to push the flaming wall into the pit. They watched the fire die down and they didn't talk and the dancers went away and Cordice felt the Presence go away too, insensibly. But something was left.

"I love you, Martha," he said.

They both knew he had the power to say that word and the right to have a woman.

Then another long time and when he looked up again the flyer was there. Willa and Allie stood beside it in dim firelight and Krebs was coming toward him.

"Come along, Cordice, I'll dress that hand for you," Krebs said.

"I'll wait by the fire, Walter," Martha said.

Cordice followed Krebs into the forest. His nervous strength was leaving him and his legs felt rubbery. He hurt all over and he needed water, but he still felt good. They came to where light gleamed through a hut of interlaced branches. Leo and Jim were already dressed and standing inside by a rough table and chest. Almost at once the plastigel soothed Cordice's cuts and blisters. He dressed and drank sparingly from the cup of water Jim handed him.

"Well, men—" he said. They all laughed.

Krebs was pulling away the twigs and feathers of his mask. Under it he had the same prognathous face as the Robadurian priests. It wasn't ugly at all.

"Cordice, I suppose you know they can regenerate that finger for you back on Earth," he said. He combed three fingers through his beard. "Biofield therapists work wonders, these days."

"I won't bother," Cordice said. "When do we swear our oath? I can swear now."

"No need," Krebs said. "You're sealed to Robadur now. You'll keep the secret."

"I would have anyway," Jim said.

Krebs nodded. "Yes. You were always a man."

They shook hands around and said goodbye. Cordice led the way to the flyer. He walked hard on his left heel to feel the pain and he knew that it is no small thing, to be a man.

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We are most pleased, always, to hear from writers who have not previously appeared in F&SF—variety is in many ways one of our most sought after goals—and it is particularly good to receive submissions from writers in other countries. Mr. Tilley, the example at hand, lives in England, and he here offers the 746,397th proof in print (by actual count) that there is no truth in that old canard about Englishmen having no sense of humor.

APPRENTICE

by Robert J. Tilley

TRIPLE CRASH PRIORITY
TO: O.C., VEGAN EXPEDITION FLAGSHIP, 'CONQUEROR 1'
FROM: SURVEYOR PE/94 (CLASS A), CODE NAME 'CREEPER'
MESSAGE COMMENCED AT 0.503, CEASED AT 0.517. DESPITE REPEATED ATTEMPTS, NO FURTHER CONTACT HAS BEEN MADE.

Conqueror 1! Calling *Conqueror 1!* Creeper calling *Conqueror 1!* Are you receiving . . . ? Thank Gringe, at last . . . I'm sorry, no. My transmitter is at maximum volume already . . . Yes, a faulty PF-valve, I imagine . . . Powerpack? Warm, but not too uncomfortable . . . Look, *Conqueror,* do you think we could forget the technical chit-chat just long enough for me to . . . Thank you, and putting it as briefly as I can, *GET ME OUT OF HERE AND RE-CALL ALL OTHER SURVEYORS IMMEDIATELY!* . . . Emergency? Are you endeavoring, at this singularly inopportune time, to tug my tentacle? For Thrum's sake get a scouter down here as quickly as possible! Brace yourselves for a bitter and humbly belittling blow, my friends—this seemingly innocent and defenseless little prize, hanging in space like an over-ripe nurgl-fruit, was actually *prepared* for our coming! . . . Impossible, eh? It seems that I shall have to go into a little further detail regarding the experiences that have placed me in this humiliating and perilous situation, cowering like a despised Droxian sleg in the base of a hollow tree, my surveying days at an end . . . Later, later . . . one moment, please, while I adjust my host to a slightly more comfortable position. He is the possessor of a large and bushy tail which is a magnificent ornament, but a con-

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founded nuisance in a confined space . . . ah, that's better.

I need, of course, go into no details as to how it all started. Following our detection of harnessed nuclear power down here and the preliminary reports that the planet was peopled by perfectly normal-seeming Class 346 bipeds—more about *that* little blunder later!—I, like the rest of my surveyors, was transported to a suitably active spot to carry out the customary precautionary investigation. My arrival, as you know, took place without mishap. Fully screened, the scouter in which I arrived landed beside a main highway, a short distance from a medium-sized town in the western hemisphere and comfortable take-over range from a native who was tinkering with the intestines of a four-wheeled grounder.

The take-over itself presented no difficulties—his resistance-quotient was comfortably low, and his somewhat erotically inclined tendencies provided admirable cushioning. His trade, investigation revealed, was that of some species of travelling merchant, for which purpose he was conveniently equipped with his petroleum-propelled grounder. I found this latter point a reassuring introduction to their technology, of course. Automatically, I assumed myself to be present in a pleasantly primitive 346/Stage 19 culture, which would mean that their development of nuclear fission was barely past the dangerous dabbling period. I traced the fault with the internal working of the vehicle—a simple fuel blockage—and my host and I proceeded on our way to the point that was to provide me with my area of investigation.

I located my destination on the far side of the town, childishly concealed behind a spike-topped wall. I stopped the vehicle opposite the guarded entrance, and made signs that I wished to converse with one of the brace of uniformed natives on the gate.

One duly approached—apparently unarmed, by the way, for which omission I was later to be eternally grateful!—and commenced the usual questioning. He was a rather taciturn-seeming individual and promised to be a little difficult, but I made the take-over with only a moderate tussle. My previous host then indulged in the expected performance of stunned surprise, being totally unable to account for his presence in the vicinity, so I sent him on his way with a few sharp words of warning while cunningly simulating a display of authoritatively aggressive suspicion. On my return, as it were, to the guardhouse, I was thankful to find that my fellow-sentinel was a morosely uncommunicative type, content to leave matters in the hands of my host, and I was spared any undue interest in the occurrence.

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A detailed investigation of my new carrier was, however, disappointing. The patrolling of the premises was not, as I had naturally hoped, among his duties, his position requiring that he remain at his post at all times, except for the customary breaks for sustenance and rest. While I'd naturally have preferred to remain with him for a little while—two take-overs in such rapid succession are a fribbl of a strain on the sneep-glands, let alone three—if I was to carry out the investigation with my accustomed speed and thoroughness, I required someone whose duties were a little more mobile and far-reaching.

I was pondering on this problem when I suddenly became aware of another presence.

A youthful male, little more than a juvenile, with vacant features and a receding chin, was standing outside the window, displaying distinct signs of unease. The crumpled slip of paper that he presented informed me that he was Herbert Wilbur Burge, aged sixteen years, and due to commence his employment as an apprentice with the General Maintainance Department at Rossiter Falls power-station on Monday, June 24th, at 8 A.M. He was to report immediately to the Personnel Department, where he would be duly initiated.

I eyed him keenly. The receding chin, an appallingly low forehead, a continual expression of passive servility . . . He shifted uncomfortably beneath my host's formidable glare, scuffed aimlessly at the ground, and rapidly assumed a promisingly violent shade of crimson.

My spirits rose at this obvious evidence of A-plus potential suitability. I casually informed my colleague of his presence and requirements, and was rudely instructed to take care of the matter myself, via the inter-office communicator. I did so, returned to the window, and skilfully made the take-over. It was painful, but not cripplingly so. Approaching footsteps coincided with my just deserted host's floundering attempts at reorientation, but my brisk removal by a youthfully efficient female from the Personnel Department took place before his pathetic confusion became openly apparent.

Following a brief wait in an anteroom inside the building, a Mr. Pfiffner was summoned. He was a short, silent, thick-necked individual with a protruding lower lip and somewhat truculent expression. He led me mutely through a maze of corridors, from which we finally emerged at our destination. It was a large, noisy, electrically lit barn of a place, situated, as far as I could determine, in the very heart of the building. Machinery, attended by males of various shapes and sizes,

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clattered around us as we paraded down the center of the room. A few glances were directed towards us, but no genuine interest was shown.

Mr. Pfiffner, as befitted his rank of overseer, was the possessor of a cubicle that contained a desk, two chairs, and a brace of metal cabinets. He led the way inside, and seated himself at the desk. Following his example, I deposited my host on the second chair, and proffered what I hoped was an ingratiating smile.

His reaction at that point was totally unexpected. For the space of several seconds he stared at me, his slowly purpling features expressing what I eventually interpreted as incredulity. Following this pause, he inquired, with considerable heat and employing an unusually disproportionate quota of expletive, what I thought I was doing.

I erased the smile, hastily. It appeared that a rigidly serious demeanor was demanded of me now that my duties were about to commence. Correspondingly, I frowned, at the same time seating my host a little more comfortably by resting one leg across the other.

Mr. Pfiffner, purpling further, hoarsely informed me that unless I assumed a standing position immediately, grave damage would be inflicted on my person. I hastily activated my host to his feet, silently castigating myself for making what had obviously been in the nature of an elementary social blunder. His further remarks were of an abusively disciplinary nature, but following my continually bleated reassurances that such an occurrence would not happen again, he seemed slightly mollified.

Eventually, he hailed another juvenile from the outer room, and issued curt instructions that I was to be shown the layout of the premises, informing me in the process that my initial duties would be those of general runabout. I was, of course, more than pleased at this turn of events. It was obvious that there would be ample opportunities for instrument checking, helping considerably towards the early completion of my mission.

The excursion through the building completed, I reported back to Mr. Pfiffner. He seemed, surprisingly, to be pleased to see me. Following polite inquiries as to my knowledge of the geography of the premises, he smilingly presented me with a slip of paper. It contained, he informed me, a list of urgently required supplies, obtainable at the carpenters' stores. His voice again colored with overtones of severity, he continued with a few words of warning. I was already guilty of one misdemeanor. If I were to return minus any of the required items, he would, in the interests of disci-

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pline, be forced to curtail my activities within the four walls of the department, restricting my duties to those of floor-scrubbing for an indefinite period.

I fervently assured him that he need have no fears that I would disappoint him in such a minor assignment, and proceeded to the carpenters' stores at speed. I checked my instruments as I went, ensuring that they were securely bedded for hasty and accurate recording. The threat of confinement and the subsequent allocation of such an immobile task as floor-scrubbing had shaken me considerably—my host's responses were so perfectly balanced by this time that the possibility of being forced to change again, perhaps finding myself perpetually tussling with some strong-willed senior, was an unnerving prospect.

Consequently, I arrived at the stores in record time, and passed across the slip of paper. The storeman soon returned, placing my quirements on the counter beside me. Displaying considerable weariness, he indicated the final item on the list and informed me that they were, unfortunately, out of stock at the present time, following this with an inexplicable inquiry as to the length of my employment. Puzzled, and vaguely disturbed, I studied the item that he had indicated.

"2 lbs.", it said, "of 6-inch rubber nails."

This was serious, of course. Hastily, I called the storeman back, and suggested that possibly two pounds of ordinary six-inch nails would suffice. Following a period of indecision he complied, handing me the cardboard box with what appeared to be a sympathetic smile. Thanking him, I hastily gathered my supplies together and proceeded back in the direction of the Maintainance Department, keenly watching for the utility that I required.

Eventually I found what I was seeking, labelled *Men's Room*. I entered an unoccupied cubicle, and carefully bolted the door.

You will, of course, have reasoned my plan of action. Something that was unavailable was urgently required if the drastic restriction of my activities was to be avoided. It was a small item, and like all good surveyors I was equipped to remedy such a minor deficiency. Anyway, I deposited my host on the seat provided, gave him a light charge, and emerged. I detached my portable transmutator from its body cavity, materialised it, made the necessary matter-wave adjustments, and placed the nails inside. The finished product, upon inspection, appeared to be satisfactory and possessed what I sincerely hoped was the accustomed degree of flexibility.

As I reassembled my kit, I thoughtfully reviewed this latest

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development. My previous assumption, based logically on visual impressions, had obviously been somewhat in error. Rubber nails indicated plainly that they were working with threnducium or a similar element, which placed them well within Stage 22. In that event, why the undeniable over-all picture of a mere 19? It was inconciveable that one could have so far overlapped the other. Mulling over this unexpected and utterly baffling complication, I reentered my just awakening host and continued on my way.

A refreshment break had just commenced as I entered. A female in a white coat was dispensing liquid nutriment from a small hand-propelled carriage. The staff, with Mr. Pfiffner at their head, were lined up beside her. I entered the cubicle, placed the goods neatly to one side of the desk, and retired to join the queue.

I was, of course, at the extreme end, and it was a short while before I was served. I was just turning away from the carriage, having politely thanked the white-coated female for something that both looked and smelled nauseatingly like the swamp-water on Droxo V11, when the sudden crash of breaking crockery emanated from Mr. Pfiffner's cubicle.

I joined in the general turning of heads. Mr. Pfiffner was seated rigidly at his desk, staring fixedly at something before him. After a short while he turned, slowly, his oddly protruding eyes finally coming to rest—on *me!*

We exchanged glances for a brief moment before I hastily turned away and plunged my face into the evil-smelling refreshment. Great Greebs, had the confounded storeman failed to supply the correct requirements after all? Appehensively, I awaited the termination of the break, and, I feared, the threatened disciplinary action.

A bell signalled the resumption of work, and I reluctantly reported back to Mr. Pfiffner, fully expecting immediate remonstrative action for my laxity. Surprisingly, though, no such incident was forthcoming. He was seated at his desk, his back towards me when I entered. Following a brief, seemingly thoughtful glance over his shoulder, he pushed a further piece of paper towards me and issued gruff instructions to proceed at once to the paint stores to obtain further requirements.

Relieved at my continued mobility, I left at once, made my way to the required section of the building and once more passed across my slip of paper. The storeman, ticking methodically through the list, paused as he came to the end, then regretfully informed me that blue paint with white spots was at present unobtainable, due, he said, to its extreme popularity.

To return with no spotted

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paint would have proved catastrophic, undoubtedly. Concealing my irritation at this further mark of inefficiency, I suggested that a large tin of blue and a small tin of white might suffice, pointing out that, tedious process though it would admittedly be, the spots could always be painted on afterwards.

The storeman, having indulged in a certain amount of raucous merriment, willingly supplied me with my requirements, at the same time informing me that when the need arose he would be only too pleased to equip me with the necessary spot-painting brushes. Smiling obligingly at his infantile attempt at humor, I thanked him and once more sought the *Men's Room*.

It took a little longer this time —after all, my equipment was not intended for anything as complicated as this. A straightforward transmutation job, certainly, but this kind of thing presented certain difficulties that might well have nonplussed a less experienced campaigner than myself. Anyway, it took all of five minutes —and there was no guarantee of really accurate spot-spacing. On my way back, while purporting to adjust an untied shoe-lace, I indulged in a little checking, the results of which provided me with considerable food for thought and the beginnings of a snoob-sized headache.

If my readings were to be relied upon, and I had no reason to doubt their veracity, their visible use of nuclear power confirmed my initial deductions that this was a good old semi-barbaric Stage 19! And yet if that was so, why the early contradictory evidence of a Stage 22, and now this, of Stage 24?

It was growing more and more obvious that there were sinister and unprecedented aspects to this case. Filled with growing puzzlement, I returned to the department and once more placed my load on the desk. Mr. Pfiffner again favored me with a solitary hasty glance, and displaying a certain amount of difficulty with his vocal chords, issued further instructions that I was to assist my youthful companion of earlier to grease various items of machinery.

It was some thirty minutes later that I was summoned to his presence again. There was someone with him this time, a tall, dour-seeming individual, who continually massaged a growth of ginger hair on his upper lip. He glanced vaguely in my general direction, before turning his head to study the activity in the outer room.

Mr. Pfiffner, once more without meeting my eyes, pushed yet another slip of paper towards me, at the same time informing me that I was to procure a further supply of six-inch rubber nails

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immediately. I departed briskly, relieved at yet a further opportunity of probing into this mystifying state of affairs. I arrived at the familiar carpenters' stores, expessed annoyance at the instructions on the slip, and glibly explained that an error seemed to have been made. What was really required, I assured the storeman, was a further two pounds of ordinary six-inch nails, identical with those I had procured earlier. Seeming somewhat distracted, he fulfilled my order with commendable despatch and I retired once more to the *Men's Room,* thanking Thrum I hadn't travelled light. Some of the younger and more reckless members of the Brigade scorn to carry full kit, I know, but it's an unwise surveyor that undertakes his assignments without carrying the full issue, including an emergency transmutator.

But how, alas, was I to know that this was the accursed exception that proves the general conformity? Anyway, there I was in the cubicle with my host snoring resonantly where I had deposited him, just emptying the nails into the transmutator, when there was a sudden sound above me.

It was an oddly asphyxiated combination of a choke and a gulp. Shaken to my very foundations, I looked up—*and saw two pairs of eyes goggling at me over the top of the door!*

I was, I confess, petrified. There was a bellowing sound produced by one of the intruders, the outer door of the room crashed open, and numerous feet thundered inside.

Slowly, then, it all dawned on me with dreadful clarity—the man Pfiffner's stunned reaction to my initially completed errand, my almost immediate dispatch on a similar task, the man in the office, my reception by the carpenters' storeman on the occasion of my just-completed second visit . . .

Do I have to tell you how I felt at that nerve-freezing moment? Here, surely, was the most fiendishly cunning, diabolically complex spy-trap ever devised, spread for all to see like a guilelessly glittering nuffly's web, while their true technological level is secreted elsewhere, meticulously shielded from prying eyes such as ours! Here was the brutal truth, suddenly and terrifyingly obvious—*These people have been invaded before, have successfully retained possession of their planet, and subsequently guarded themselves against further such attempts!*

Anyway, at that point in my thinking, the door caved in. At any second I expected to feel the numbing blow of a stun-field. My host was obviously useless to me now and there was no time to worry about my transmutator—almost without thinking, and with a wrench that worked havoc on my sneep-glance, I took over the first

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figure that came boiling in through the door.

Of all people, Mr. Pfiffner!

It was, I fully realised, no time to be fastidious, even if I had been capable of a further appropriation. Cunningly feigning sudden nervous collapse, I fought my way out of the cubicle and towards the outer door, gasping in a convincingly panic-stricken manner. I was half-way there when a stentorian voice, presumably that of the individual with the ginger growth beneath his nose, made itself heard above the babel, demanding to know the whereabouts of my new host!

I confess it—I panicked. As his query sounded sharply above the clamor, my reactions were purely involuntary. It completely failed to occur to me that all he wanted was corroboration of his story. Hastily elbowing my way through the few people that remained between myself and the door, I bolted!

The corridors, mercifully, were almost deserted. Startled shouts and the poundings of footsteps sounded behind me as I shot through the main doorway into the open air. By the outer gate, the guard who had been my earlier host moved forward with a look of stern inquiry. I paused only to kick him in the stomach, and ran on. There were more shouts behind me as I turned left and sprinted vigorously down the road towards the shelter of the wooded countryside.

There was the hum of activated grounders behind me. I glanced back and saw vehicles pouring out of the gates and down the road towards me. Hastily, I tumbled my host down a grassy bank and struggled desperately across a long-grassed field.

My mistake was almost immediately apparent. A side road, which I had missed in my haste, cut diagonally away from the main highway and ran directly across in front of me. Vehicles were already halting in my path, with figures springing from them and down the incline that surrounded the field.

And then I saw my savior.

How can I possibly describe the emotions that I experienced at sighting the still, silent form of my present, and alas, final host? Suffice to say that as my blurred gaze discovered him where he crouched a few feet away, almost completely concealed by the vegetation of the field, my heart indulged in a tiny leap of hope.

As the menacing circle closed around me, I made my final take-over.

My final take-over. Friend, I do not use these words lightly. In a moment of almost unendurable agony, my already brutally overtaxed sneep-glands weefled irreparably.

The suddenly released Mr.

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Pfiffner stumbled wheezingly on towards his compatriots. Then, as my pursuers clustered noisily around my shrilly protesting former host, I stealthily rose from my haunches and fled away from the gabbling mob, towards the safety of the distant woods.

Well, there you have it. My narrative has fully explained, I trust, why I am at the present moment huddled inside the base of a hollow tree on a wooded hillside, my nerves in shreds, minus my emergency transmutator, and at the end of a surveying career that has not, I make bold to hope, been entirely unworthy of note. Presumably my rescuer has his receiver open . . . ah, there you are, scouter . . . nice to know that you're on your way . . . Look, I'd better give you a rough idea of what to expect.

As you've already gathered, My host is non-humanoid—something in the nature of a wild animal, in fact . . . oh, pretty small, fortunately . . . my regrettable inability to leave him without medical assistance means, of course, that we'll have to take him along. He's a rusty brown in color, with sharp features and ears, and is the possessor, as I believe I mentioned earlier, of a magnificent bushy tail . . . Right, I'll be looking for you!

Are you still with me, *Conqueror*? You sound subdued, my friend. The full implications of my story have, I take it, been understood? . . . Precisely . . . I fear that to pursue our present policy of protective commandeering in this part of the galaxy may produce results other than those to which we have become accustomed.

One moment, *Conqueror*—there appears to be a disturbance of some kind in the vicinity . . . what the wrrxl's going on? My previous pursuers have left, but I can see scattered movement down in the valley above which my tree is situated . . . Well, as far as I can make out at this distance it's some sort of gathering, but to what purpose I really couldn't say . . . Oh, well, I doubt very much that it concerns *me* in any way. . . .

Just a minute, though! There's little doubt that they're moving in this direction . . . I can see them a little clearer now . . . *Conqueror*, I regret to have to inform you that they're taking *exactly* the same route that I took myself, a short while ago! There is, I fear, little doubt that some kind of patrol has detected my present whereabouts! Great Greebs, are there no *limits* to their mercilessly efficient defences? Hello scouter, it's obvious now that my one remaining chance is to make a run for it. I am breaking cover immediately, leaving my transmitter open so that you can keep a bearing on me.

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And for the love of Thrum—HURRY!!!

END OF MESSAGE.

THE ABOVE TRANSMISSION WAS CONCLUDED BY A MOUNTING CRESCENDO OF SHARP STACATO SOUNDS WHICH COULD POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY STATIC. THE LAST ENUNCIATED SOUND TO BE RECEIVED WAS IN AN ALIEN TONGUE AND PRESUMABLY MADE BY A MEMBER OF THE PURSUING PARTY. THE VERBAL TRANSLATION OFFERED BY THE LINGUADJUSTOR IS GIVEN BELOW.

TALLIHO.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXIII

WHEN FERDINAND FEGHOOT WAS REJUVENATED in 4128, a slight error brought him out as an apple-cheeked boy of eleven. As such he was legally an incompetent orphan, and his guardians procured him a berth as midshipman in the Space Navy.

The hard-bitten crew made him the butt of many practical jokes. However, on the planet Galumph, when they took him out snipe-hunting, he returned with a sackful of snipe. And in the Scanderbeg System, ordered to locate a space-stretcher, he contacted the first Uilliu ship ever seen—just full of the gadgets, which the Uilliuub had invented as a meteor defense. Finally a tricky old CPO popped him into a lifeboat and sent him to Earth on an impossible errand.

Feghoot returned six weeks later—and with him were a dozen young female apes. These rushed forward at once, eagerly trying to shake hands with the Captain, who was thoroughly angry.

"My word!" the Chaplain exclaimed. "Look at them, sir. Not one of them is right-handed—every one is a southpaw!"

The Captain ignored him. "Explain yourself, Mr. Feghoot!" he roared.

"I was only obeying the Chief Bosun's orders," lisped Ferdinand Feghoot in his childish treble. "He sent me for some left-handed monkey wenchs."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON

(with thanks to Dan Kelly)

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Jane Rice has a special talent for evoking with a glancing adjective a fully rounded character, or—as she does here—making real with casual indirect references an entire civilization. . . .

THE WHITE PONY

by Jane Rice

EDNA IS A SWELL WIFE. WE GET along together fine. Better than most married couples at any rate. There are occasions, however, when she puts me in mind of Fili, our cat, who still believes in birds.

Take this notion Edna has that I led a mad, erratic, unconventional life before I met her and settled down. An absurd idea.

To begin with, I had few friends. Jim and (?) Stella Tyler. Greg. I wasn't a rockbound iconoclast but I pretty much whistled a single tune. To end with, I couldn't afford to be either eccentric or gregarious, if I wanted to stay employed and solvent. Besides, I had this urge to write and writing is a lonesome road.

I remember yet my first acceptance from an Independent. I read the tape four times before I actually believed they'd bought my fiction ms and were going to issue me ninety A stamps. Ninety A stamps in a lump was WOW.

When you have one jumper, and one dustproof, and one UW dc-kit not worth a hoot, and one cramped unit in a scarred, old, rundown, honeycomb type prefab, and earn your living—if you could call it that—hacking out action items for a vdo paper—under a supervisor like "Blast-off" Switzer, ninety A stamps is a double booster shot in the ego. The main point was, though, I'd proved I could do it.

I wanted to stand somewhere high and gaze out and all around. So I went up on the roof. It wasn't any great shakes of a height but it was handy and the scenic spread of the tropolis through the smaze, with the astralights coming on and the sector divisors pinked out, was a lulu.

The new girl, with the vaguely familiar face, was up there leaning against the meshing taking it in. For a fleeting instant, I almost identified her.

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"Looks as if you could make a wish on it, doesn't it," I said. It was a statement. Not a question.

"Umm," she said. She smiled absently, intent on her own wish off in the mauzy distance, like a signal from a spotter's tower. We watched the City brighten and deepen.

"What would you wish for?" she asked, after awhile. Her voice sounded misty and alight, like the view, and she had a soft up-and-down way of speaking.

"A white pony, maybe," I mused aloud, and promptly regretted it. The white pony had become a sort of symbol. I didn't care to share it, even jokingly, with anyone. Especially a chance rooftop newcomer.

"What would *you* wish for?" I countered quickly, to get out from under.

"Ummmmm . . . I don't know," she said. "There're so many things. Unless you're hungry. Then it narrows down to food." She tucked a blowing tendril of fair hair under her hood. "I'd choose something to eat, I suppose. A no more something. Like . . . well . . . like peaches. Remember peaches?" She sighed. "Delicious, slurpy peaches," she added, dreamily.

I remembered. Sun-ripe, blushed, velvet skinned, the golden inner meat clinging to the dimpled, dull red seedstone, and each bite dripping with sweet fruity juice. 'Slurpy.' Expressive. Choice. Descriptive. Perfect. Suddenly hungry myself, and intrigued by her ability to evoke a whole lost way of life with one word, I heard myself say, "Would you settle for a Fried Brown at the Hasty-Tasty?"

A glue-footed silence crawled out of nowhere and laid down between us. When she spoke, her tone reminded me of a limits inspector rejecting a yellow pass.

"I wasn't hinting," she said. "If I've given you the wrong impression, I'm sorry."

"Look," I said stiffly, "I'm not representing the United World Welfare League. Nor am I planning any surprise maneuvers under the table. The invitation was spur of the moment and purely impersonal."

"I didn't mean—" she began.

"Shall we have another lunge at it?" I cut in. "Do you want a Fried Brown? Or don't you."

The Hasty Tasty was an eatery close by. It wasn't mad. Or unconventional. Or hasty. Or very tasty, for that matter. The "atmosphere" was stool-and-table and the only erratic thing in the place was a zoneboard with the weather flashed on it. The food was of the punchtab ilk. The regular "patrons" called the cashier "Mom." That's how you knew they were regulars. That and a certain worn sameness about them, as if they

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were all of a pattern, despite their diverse appearances, ages, and occupations. Mom called *them* "Pal." She was a dead ringer for what's-his-name, the genial robot on the Larry Wilson show, except that she was fatter and played the races. Greg once took a mention at an art exhibit for a pastiche he'd done of Mom's racedrome mementos.

A Fried Brown was a kind of grilled sandwich roll served with gravy. It was filling and it was cheap and it retained an element of novelty as you never knew what might be in it.

There were no little signs and portents that Cupid was loose and on the prowl. But that was the commence. That was when he flew in, circled, and began rubbing rosin on his bowstring. That was where it started. With Fried Browns at the Hasty Tasty.

I learned her name was Margaret but that she preferred Margie. Margaret was "too Sunday," she said. She came from an area near the End Zone. The recent demise of a maiden aunt with whom she had lived had left her on her own with a couple of paid-up certificates. These she had turned in for the necessary wherewith to transfer to the tropolis. She wanted to "prove" herself.

She hoped I wouldn't feel she was eating "under false pretenses" but I hadn't let her explain why she was hungry, had I? It was her own fault. She'd decided to forego supper to economize for having had two lunches because she had gone without breakfast, to economize for having bought a "darling bracelet dohinkey" and to "make up" for being "out" the price of a fare on the escaway on account of the token getting stuck in the "thingmadoodle."

I could visualize that stuck token. Its shape was distinctive. It had DO NOT USE ON ESCAWAY illuminated on it. Its raised . . . was unmistakable if you merely recognized the elementary fundamentals of warning insignia. Even the blind could tell the difference.

I could also visualize the deceased aunt. She was having a chain reaction in her slotbox and was murmuring, "To *prove* herself, did she say?" And I had finally pinned down my impression of having met her doe-eyed niece, Margie, before. It was the forehead. The forehead was the rounded intellectual brow of Sarah Ames who had been top honor back in Continuation School.

Perhaps it was this false resemblance to the sagacious Sarah that tickled my fancy and gave our conversations absurd turns and twists when we happened into each other during the following several weeks. Not that she kept up a flow of chatter. She didn't. "Ummm," was her favorite response. In fact, walking back with her from the area bakery one day,

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it occurred to me she was the one girl I'd ever known who didn't think talking was an essential social grace. She didn't laugh unduly either. And she took her femininity for granted. She didn't feel impelled to make me conscious of it.

And, there was the April morning we had a Red Caution weather warning and shared an equalizer to the escaway and she stayed in step and didn't hang on my arm. There was the young May evening when the green moon and its paler satellite hung in the gathering sky, and she was wearing a lavender jumper and had her hood pushed back—and, for no reason, I felt protective and muscular. There was the dull dumb Sunday when I couldn't squeeze out a paragraph and, for want of what to do, took her to a telovie. There was the dark Saturday I emerged from the archives to see her number hurrying by and, lengthening my stride to overtake her, saw the number wasn't hers after all . . . and was disappointed.

Our first real date was in late May when I brought her to a party at Jim and Stella Tyler's down in area 4 near the canals.

Jim and I, and Greg, had been inseparable as boys. Our friendship, while a bit frayed by Time and Change, and by Stella, and by Greg's yen for lost horizons, still held at the seams.

The party was a potluck deal, co-op style, where everybody contributed to the festal board. We took a sausage stick. Margie mixed in but she didn't "belong," and didn't attempt to. I'd suspected that was how she would be, which was why I'd asked her to go. I didn't fit in either. I seldom did in a group. It was as though they were mutations and I was a transmute. There's a distinction. Small, but it's there. It was nice to have Margie for company. The festivities dissolved fairly early because the dust squawkers were warming up.

Going home on the SSS, otherwise called the Sweat, Smother, and Stand, Margie fell asleep. She might have been entitled *Sleeping Girl.* By Greg, maybe. For all Greg's tousled trimensional approach, he believed in beauty. Beauty, he contended, was the one remaining defenseless thing left. Anywhere. Margie's lax upturned palm and the shadowed curve of her cheek would have had him squirting paint tubes all over a palette.

Summer arrived overnight, as if it had come pellmell ahead of the sunrise and had tripped on a spotter's tower and collapsed. One minute Spring was trolloping by scattering showers and placards for the Summer Pops, and the next minute Summer had straddled us, spraddle-legged, licking a frostdip and thumbing her nose at the re-

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cently completed, highly touted and presumably adequate, city-wide airwash system.

It was a good summer. Greg returned from his travels, a trifle thinner but the same easy-going Greg in a narrow studio amid a clutter of queer bright canvasses, burned matches, unwashed cups and ideas. "Blast-off" Switzer got prickly heat. The choke-and-strangle snorer who lived below me moved. I had two more stories accepted and, under this tonic influence, dived into an adventure novella.

And, my interest in Margie grew steadily in strength, like the V sirens, until it split a decibel one night in what is still called the Park. We had stopped to watch the aureola and, strolling on, hand in hand, we paused at a bend in the meshing and kissed.

Her voice comes whispering back across the intervening years. "Isn't the aureola glorious!" Which was it exactly. Same aureola, new perspective.

"It looks like kissing is, doesn't it," she said . . . and I wondered if I could ever make a pass at anyone so shiveringly trustful.

She was about as deep as a plate but, somehow, she could put an extra dimension into an innocuous comment. "As long as we remember how roses were, and robins, and fireflies and things, they're not really extinct." And, walking home from an open air concert, "The City isn't big. *It's* a place full of places, that's all." On the subject of Greg, "He's awfully *very,* isn't he." From an observation float, "The principal difference between ups and downs is where you are."

And she had this silky hair and those hazy eyes, and quiet asleep-looking hands, and that habit of listening with her head tilted and her lips slightly parted. She was the only girl I'd ever gone with who didn't have mannerisms, or who could put on her eye shield without a mirror.

There was the Hasty-Tasty, and the roof, and the Park, and the dunes, and the Ruins, and the Sunday Specials to various play centers.

There was the Sunday we went with a bunch to May Rocket, and Greg won a floppy doll for Margie, after I'd given up, and I could've wrapped it around his neck. There was the Sunday Margie and I picnicked on the Pinnacle and both recognised, simultaneously, the shape of a wedding cake in a harmless fleecy cloud passing overhead.

And there was the August Sunday I took her to my sister Polly's in area 62, although there wasn't anything remarkable about it except that it was family . . . haphazard, good natured, interruptive, company first, you-kids-shut-that-wicket-and-behave-yourselves family.

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At the supper table, Bub's piping, "It Uncle Bill *her* Uncle Bill, too?" and Cissy's superior, if somewhat ambiguous, "He's her *fella*. Else why'd she be here?" provoked general laughter. And set it up in frame.

I finished the adventure novella in September, and got three hundred A stamps for it, plus a request for more of the same. I was in! EeeeeYOW! With a heady, nearly drunken, exhilaration of release I quit the vdo paper. If, like Margie, I was going to "prove" myself, the Time was Now.

I counted out three months advance room rent into Mrs. Hellwig's genteel superintendent's claw. I wanted to be rid of the sensation that I was eternally one short jump ahead of her. I wanted a long enough headstart. I even inquired about her "stummick trouble" and tsktsked sympathetically while she told me, in lurid detail. That's how happy I was. For three whole months I was freeeeeeeee.

Somewhert along in there I began to dream about the white pony again.

The summer I was twelve, the white pony had been the prize in an essay contest sponsored by a dc aerosol company. When I wasn't composing essays or scrounging aerosol labels I was fixing up our dilapidated decontamination hut for a stable, assisted by Jim and Greg. That winter we had had the cleanest, soundest, emptiest dc hut in the area.

Save for Margie's appearance in the dream, the new version didn't vary drastically from the original. Mane and tail flying, the pony eluded my pursuit through toppling ruins, a shriveled forest, over deserts, into tunnels. Margie gave me talismans to carry while I gave chase. A polished pebble of immense significance. A glove, "For sooth," she explained. A box of meat cubes, whispering, "Here are *these*."

And, it was along in there that I began to think in terms of "our." Our song, our knock, our table at the Hasty-Tasty . . .

Love didn't rise up *boo*. It quietly hove to and fell in step one Fall afternoon during the second-shift exodus. I had gone to meet her at "our" wicket outside the drome in which she was temporarily employed. (All her employments were temporary.) Swinging off the escaway, I saw her before she saw me and it came to me, like a touch on the sleeve . . . I'm in love with her.

Funny, the photo clarity of it. The news tape: ACTION ON TRANS-SPAN IS CITY CRY. The skinny kid bouncing a ball. The patriarch out of a Twentieth Century novel imperiously hailing a Lift—and the operator asking, conversationally, as he missed me by a hair, "You aim me slotbox you, Mac?"

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The phrase "walking on a cloud" isn't apt. You walk around in it. And you see like dogs hear. The same old fluttering tell-tales on the corners were gay as flags. Each day had a song in its heart. Every street was part of a parade. Kisses were violins. Desire was a gentle ache, tender and sweet and yearning. I almost caught the white pony twice in a row. And Greg, striking a match and watching it burn, said, "So she's different. So? Take it from papa, they all are." And I wanted to clout him.

In fiction, young love wrestles a host of mighty difficulties but where to be alone, come the solstice, isn't among them, since there is no such object as a bed. Well, you can't spend the evening with the girl of your dreams in a unit where the bed is the predomiant feature. You simply—cannot—do it. You sit on the ramp.

I can see it. The cracks, and the rust, and the warped rail. The buckled plate on "our" landing, on which that poor, scurrying, earless Johnson kept stubbing his built-up boot. The vacant niche in the wall which in a bygone era had probably housed a Reichert's hose. And a boy, saying, "I love you." And a girl, her face like a drowsy kitten's, saying, "I love you, too."

"What are you thinking about?"

"Ummm . . . how it'll be someday. A two-unit, dishes, pretty floor cushions. Doris who works next to me has a boy friend connected with Unit Allocation and she says he'll keep his eye open for us. Maybe by Spring. . . . What are *you* thinking about?"

"A white pony."

"Oh, you. You're forever saying that."

I recall, likewise, a swift succession of scenes, on the order of a fantasy sequence starring a dance team. Thanksgiving Dinner at Polly's. Wish-shopping on 5 Street. The Author At Work. Skating on the Free Canal. Tyler's Holiday Party. Under the Synthetic Mistletoe. New Year's Eve, fusing into a fuzzy comic sketch wherein Greg and I are lugubriously singing an old sentimental folk-song for Margie, with Jim trying to harmonize and having trouble with the word "acquaintensh," and Stella acting as if she didn't know us.

Immediately thereafter came Inside January, or, Mrs. Hellwig Rides Again. Having to pay rent once more sharpened up the focus considerably. That, and Doris.

Doris and Margie visited back and forth, and set each other's hair, and went on diets. One day, when I went down to see if Doris had gone—and she hadn't—they had a generous heaping of what appeared to be quick cement spread on their faces.

Doris called me, "Willie."

"Greetings, Willie," she'd say. "How's friction?" Or, "What's the

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price of rust?" She had a zillion of them.

It was simply her mode of salutation. Meaningless. Fairly humorous. But there were days when I seemed to be this genetic error "Willie." Days a plot wouldn't jell, or a story rolled up its eyes and died aborning, or when one I'd counted on as sure-fire was rejected.

It was "Willie" who'd hint, *You're not good enough. You haven't got what it takes. You'll never make the climb.*

I'd shove my jaw at him. "I am. I have. I will. There's plenty of room at the top."

The top isn't having any.

"You wait," I'd tell him.

I'll wait, he'd drawl, a grin in his sneering ennunciation. *Will Margie?*

As the winter drew to a close, I'd sometimes rouse in the night with a sense of urgency, as though I'd overslept or had gotten misplaced.

I remember one night I wakened, groaning, from a pony hunt in the course of which Margie slipped her ID tag in my hand. The tag had BE MINE printed on it, like the Valentines in the cases at Restorationville. The dream was so clear I sat bolt upright.

Ain't nobody here but us Willies, Willie said, and I got up and flicked on the light and peered at myself in the mirror. I looked pale and sick.

"Go ahead and marry the girl," Greg advised. "Stop beating yourself over the head. You don't have to stay in the City. Go to the archipelago. Or a colony. And write, write, write. This century needs artists, poets, writers. Vision. Go to one of the outer bountylands. They're safe, if you exercise reasonable precaution. Take it from papa you can live in rare style on two C stamps a day on any of the outer bounties.

He made such a plan sound feasible as he unrolled it, resembling an outlander himself in his sandals and paint pants, surrounded by tortured colors, and the wanderlust again upon him. I could tell, invariably, when he was getting ready to shoo off. He began to pace, as if he were caged. And he ripped and tore at dissatisfactions—like the canvas that lay, slashed, where he'd hurled it after he'd mutilated it. But the image of bounty life, as he painted it on my mind, was as plain and as possible as his parting words, "Listen, you introspective lovesick ass, all you have to do is *do it.*"

I left elated. A winding road, instead of the escaway. The friendly bounty people with their seeds, and determination, and courage, instead of the government boys and form sheets and commissaries. Write, write, write, and Margie. The sweet doing nothing.

I floated home. "Our" area already had the ephemeral quality

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that everyday localities develop prior to imminent departure. The Hasty-Tasty was "remember when. Two effusive women taking leave of each other in front of the bakery lent a further transitory aspect —emphasized by the sliding hiss of the closing door. "Our" prefab had acquired a faint nostalgic antique charm. Mrs. Hellwig, talking to Margie by the lockers, had ceased to be an ogre. I got rid of her with the greatest of ease by the simple expedient of remarking, "Whew, I feel dusty."

"I've got news," Margie said, slipping her arm through mine.

"So've I. Wait'll you hear."

I remember how golden she seemed, drifting about doing the little primping things girls do when they come in from work—powdering her nose, applying fresh lipstick—while I unfolded our future. And the crystalline moment when she pivoted, elbows uplifted, in the act of brushing her hair, and exclaimed, "Married? Married!"

Her eyes were wide and startled. "Why we're not even *engaged.* Whatever made you think—"

"Whatever made me think—" I repeated stupidly. "You're joking."

But she wasn't. It was crazy. And it went on and on. Over and over.

"Margie, you said you loved me. You said so, Margie."

"I *do.* But I'm not *in* love with you, Bill. Don't you see. Can't you understand? Loving someone and being *in* love with him isn't the same thing at *all.*"

"If the prospect of living in the outlands is the stumbling block—"

"It *isn't.* I wouldn't want to, but that isn't it. No, there isn't anyone else. I know I said I love you, and I *do,* but I'm not *in* love with you. How can I marry you, Bill when I'm not in love with you? I *know* I kept talking about a two-unit but I didn't mean with you. I meant with Doris. I *did* tell you. You didn't *listen.* That's the news I had for you. Lew found us a two-unit today. I was telling Mrs. Hellwig when you came in. Lew is *Doris'* boy friend. I *did* tell you. Months ago. If you'd just *listened* instead of half-listened. Oh, Bill. If I've given you the wrong impression, I'm sorry. What do you mean this is where you came in? Don't look at me like that. *Please.* . . ."

I just stood there. Even when she began to cry. Unbelieving. Stunned. Waiting for it to sink in. Trying to cope with the lunatic sensation that I was an audience watching a nightmare and that the white pony would gallop past any second with my dead body bumping along behind him in a snarled tangle of stirrups and reins.

I helped Margie move. There wasn't much. Nothing really that made any appreciable gap in the

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furnishings but, taking a last glance around, the emptiness was a physical blow.

I didn't prolong the agony at her new quarters. Doris must've known the score for she skipped the "Willie" routine and shook hands Goodbye and made herself scarce.

"Couldn't we be like before?" Margie said. "Couldn't you *try*?"

I drew her close and kissed her hair, and then I left.

I held the cubicle door as I went out for a chap who was juggling his key and a grocery pak. We exchanged noncomittal pleasantries and I thought . . . Is he the one? Have I shouldered by him, unknowing, somewhere in a crowd? Will they picnic on the Pinnacle? He was my height and build and he was wearing a UW-issue dustproof similar to mine, and I felt as if I were passing myself entering.

When I got to the nearest bar I went in. I guess my expression had a lot in common with the Great Crater because the barman set the bottle beside me and let me alone.

I sat there, thinking things out, picking up the pieces. I saw that Jim and Stella were pretending to be what they were not and never would be. To whit: Necessary. I saw that Greg would wind up a "character" addressed as Papa and that he was running away from, rather than searching for, himself. That was why he always came back. Underneath, where it counted, he knew. I saw it was the day-to-day stuff that was the challenge and required the most bravery and made the best story in the long run. And I saw, with a strange glassy insight, I was damn well going to be one of Mom's "Pals" if I wasn't careful.

When I stepped into the street again I was tired, as though I had gone a great distance uphill. But I knew what to do.

Which was how I met Edna. She was in my class at vocational-rehab. . . .

I was right about Jim and Stella. I missed on Greg. Greg died that summer, of desperation possibly, while journeying towards those lost horizons of his.

And, this morning when I ran into Margie in the flue, I wasn't too astonished. As she once said, the City isn't big. It's high, but it isn't big. Considering the lack of elbow room, it's amazing such encounters don't happen more frequently.

She was older-looking and she was wearing one of those cape businesses that apparently are in vogue this season, but she wasn't that many years ago older-looking, and she still had those enormous eyes and that habit of tilting her head.

She said, *"Bill."*

And I said, "Margaret!" and we

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inched out of the throng and talked for a minute. The usual polite surface scratchings. She was married, had two healthy children, lived in New Boston . . . and so on.

In parting, she said, to keep it light, "Did you ever get that white pony?"

I thought of Edna, and of our strong young son Billy. I thought of my work, and our home, and our mode of life. I thought of the grass beginning to grow back, and the Hope, and how the force field is steadily pushing out beyond former points of no return. I thought of the four powerful words that once more form our universal motto: *In God We Trust.*

And I smiled at Margie and answered, "Yes. Yes, I finally got it."

DO NOT MISS

NEXT MONTH'S

ALL NEW

ALL STAR

ISSUE

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Robert Murray, like Robert J. Tilley, is a newcomer to F&SF. He is also, in terms of being published, a beginning writer—a fact which is hardly apparent in this tale of Sergeant LaTouche, who waited at the bottom of the Rhenish hill for the attack from the Germans dug into the vineyard above.

THE REPLACEMENT

by Robert Murray

SERGEANT LATOUCHE RAISED his head slightly and looked up the gently sloping hill. The vineyard, gleaming with frost under the Rhenish moon, climbed in light and shadow to the star-shot horizon. There, he knew, the lip of the hill curled over and down, falling away to where the Rhine slid silently like a rivulet of milk under the white moon.

For the moment there was utter silence at the foot of the vineyard where the American cavalry platoon lay on its collective stomach in the hollows of the ground. From his position in a shallow slit trench Sergeant LaTouche could see no one. This did not surprise him—any experienced soldier knew that vision on a bright, moonlit night could be more deceptive than on a dark night of no moon.

The Germans were dug into the vineyard above. They, too, were quiet now, but LaTouche knew they were there. A few minutes earlier the platoon had dismounted from its armored cars and started to move up the hill on foot, their boots crunching softly in the rime-topped earth. Suddenly the vineyard had bloomed with small flickering blossoms of orange light. Schmeissers raked the slope, and two men fell. At the other end of the skirmish line, LaTouche hadn't seen them, but he had heard them screaming.

Manual, LaTouche thought bitterly. Field Expedients. How to Find the Enemy. Die.

Soon the order would come from the CP back on the road and the platoon would start to infiltrate up the hill. It would be close work with bayonets and knives, random carbine shots and short-lobbed grenades. Curses, struglings and stifled screams in the frosty vineyard. He raised his eyes to the star-mobbed sky again and

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grunted softly, envisioning the Rhine beyond the hill, white as May wine in the moonbeams.

Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten—

His mind dollied back and out of the slit trench like a camera and he saw himself lying at the foot of the hill, four hundred yards from the ancient river in the moon-drenched, Wagnerian night.

My name is Joseph LaTouche, he told himself, and I come from Fall River, Massachusetts. What is all this?

A soft sound made him whirl in the slit trench. A little sound like the whisk of a mouse paw, and LaTouche was on his back, the Luger snapped from the holster under his arm and the muzzle level with a thin white face at the edge of the trench.

"It's all right," the face said in the moonlight, "I'm Smith."

"If you want to go on being Smith," LaTouche whispered savagely, "use the password."

The thin soldier smiled, and because the upper half of his face was hidden in black shadow the smile was grotesque. He was on his stomach at the edge of the trench, dragging his rifle awkwardly, grasping it high on the wood toward the front end of the sling.

"Is there room in there?" he said, indicating the trench.

"Just enough," LaTouche said, "roll in."

Smith rolled in next to the sergeant.

"I'm a replacement," he said.

LaTouche smiled wryly. "Anybody who drags a gun with the breach in the dirt," he said softly, "couldn't be anything else."

"The First Sergeant back there by the road," Smith said, "told me to report to you."

LaTouche frowned in the moonlight.

"How did you know where to find me?"

"It was easy," Smith said. He had a low, almost monotonous voice. LaTouche couldn't see his face.

"Private Smith," LaTouche said with amusement, "for a replacement you don't seem very nervous. This vineyard is crawling with Krauts, you know."

Smith chuckled softly. "Nothing is going to happen to me." The quiet superiority of his manner annoyed LaTouche.

"Nothing except that you might die in the next ten minutes. Replacements go fast, didn't you know that?"

"Die?" Smith said. "Don't be silly. There's no such thing."

A nut, LaTouche decided.

"A philosopher," he said, "a regular little philosopher."

The replacement smiled his Grand Guignol smile again and tilted the green steel helmet back on his head. He turned and looked at LaTouche, his eyes, pale blue,

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looked like two grayish ice chips in the starlight.

"You have no philosophy about all this?" He waved broadly at the vineyard, the gesture carrying his hand above the level of the trench.

"Keep your hands down," LaTouche snapped; "you'll get them shot off."

"Yes," he said after a pause. "I have a philosophy that gets me by. My philosophy is, if you're going to get it you're going to get it, and if you're not, you're not."

"The garden variety," Smith said softly, "that's the garden variety and you know it. You're quoting me that to shut me up. Actually you think about this in much broader terms all the time. You are constantly struck by the unnaturalness of your being here doing what you're doing. On a night like this you think about it quite a lot."

LaTouche stared at him uneasily. Both their helmets now were begemmed with frost.

"Take it easy," Smith said, "you're not the only thinker in this outfit. Everybody in this outfit has the same strange thoughts as you."

"What do you know about this outfit?" LaTouche said.

"Quite a bit," said the replacement, "that's why I'm here."

"All right," LaTouche said in sudden disgust. The frown smoothed off his forehead. "I don't know what you're talking about, and the hell with it."

They lay silently in the sparkling ground; even the wind was stilled by the bright silver of the night. Suddenly LaTouche raised his head again.

"I hear a cricket," he said, "can you hear it?"

"It may be one of the radios back in the armored cars," Smith said.

"No, I know a cricket when I hear it. There shouldn't be a cricket singing here with the frost still on the ground."

"The season is changing," Smith said, "sometimes things overlap."

"It doesn't make sense," LaTouche insisted. "I wonder if the others can hear it."

"What others?" Smith said.

"For God's sake," LaTouche said, "the rest of the platoon. They're dug in all around us."

"The season is changing," the replacement said softly in the moonlight.

"Smith," LaTouche said slowly, "I think you're what we call a Section Eight, and I'm going to see about you. I don't think you should be here."

The thin white face creased in another smile. LaTouche looked at his wrist watch. "Any minute now," he murmured. He drew the Luger from his shoulder holster again, flicked off the safety, loosened the trench knife in his right boot, and checked the two grenades that hung from his field

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jacket with the spring handles stuck through safety pins.

"Yes," Smith said, "any minute now."

He rolled over on his side to look squarely into the sergeant's face, his own sharp, strange face outlined in the moonlight as if it were spotlighted.

"Since Normandy," he said, "you've had a lot of casualties, haven't you?"

"We're first contact troops," LaTouche said; "of course we have."

"Dead?"

"Plenty."

"Sergeant LaTouche," Smith said. His voice suddenly sounded deep and loud, and LaTouche's head snapped up.

"Well?"

"Did you ever see any one of them get killed?"

"I—well, as a matter of fact—"

"Did you?"

"No," LaTouche said slowly, "I never thought about it before, but the fatalities, and even the wounded-evacuated always happened in one of the other platoons. The two times this platoon was hit I happened to be on patrol with some other platoon." He stopped, looked at the ground, and then at the crowds of stars.

"That's funny," he said musingly, "you know that's really quite remarkable. I never thought about it before."

"You would have," Smith said, "tonight, sooner or later. I just happened to remind you about it."

"What is all this crystal-ball business?" LaTouche asked, annoyed again. "Who are you, God, that you can tell me what I would have been thinking?"

Smith rolled over on his stomach again, and rested his chin on his hands.

"The human mind," he said, "or let's just say—the mind. The power of it, the weakness of it, the variety of it."

LaTouche snapped a look at the replacement in the shining darkness. "Yes," he said slowly, "I think about that, too."

"Of course you do," Smith said with his maddening assurance. "You speculate and explore and wonder and then at one point you start to feel nervous about it and you retreat."

"Yes," LaTouche said simply. The resentment he felt was beginning to fade and he didn't know why.

"Crazy thoughts," Smith said, shifting slightly in the slit trench, his head still turned away. "Thoughts that are not for sane discussion. Thoughts you'd be ashamed to make public."

"Yes."

"I know," Smith said, "for instance, I've often thought how much war is like a personal emotional crisis, containing all the fear, the frenzied activity, the defense and offense of a mind strug-

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gling to break through—to the truth."

"Or," he smiled fully into LaTouche's face, "to ward it off."

"I suppose so," the sergeant said.

"Yes," Smith went on smoothly, "fascinating, isn't it? Thinking of it that way, it's almost as if there were only one great, all pervading mind in creation, and war merely the psychotic expression of that mind's breakdown."

Again he smiled in the moonlight. "Or break*through*. What if war were actually the battle the insane part of this great and lonely mind was putting up against learning the truth?"

LaTouche had been listening with a rapt look. Now he pulled himself together with a tiny shake of his head.

"Yes," he said impatiently, "that's all very well, and as you say I often speculate along those lines. But for all practical purposes it's a lot of manure."

Smith grinned.

"Manure," LaTouche repeated firmly. He looked at his wrist watch again. "The second platoon," he said in a businesslike tone, "has moved north and then over to the river bank. They're coming back down the river and up the rear side of this hill. It's timed for oh-twelve-hundred. At midnight they'll start down from the top of the vineyard and we'll start up from the bottom."

He stared at the replacement with a look of military sternness that held a hint of desperation. The man's eyes bored into him like icepicks, and the sergeant's stomach knotted with a fear that had nothing to do with the concealed Germans above in the vineyard. He turned the back of his wrist toward Smith so that the face of his watch showed.

"That's one hundred seconds from now," he said. "I want you to remove the clip from that rifle, eject the round from the breach, and fix your bayonet. We can't have any rifles shooting up from the bottom of the hill with our own people coming down."

Smith complied with the order silently, slowly, almost lazily.

"One hundred seconds," he said, "is time enough."

"Time enough for what?" LaTouche said tensely.

"Some go one way, some go another," Smith said. "Don't try to understand that part of it, and don't fight it. Let it come. It's time for you to know, and I'm only here to help, to speed it up."

Sweat started on LaTouche's forehead in the frosted moonlight. "Yes?" he said softly—listening—his eyes clouded.

"You don't mind blood and violence?"

"No."

"But you don't like it?"

"No."

"Given your choice you'd rather

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not see anybody hurt or killed."

"That's right."

"In three full campaigns you haven't seen anybody killed or hurt."

"No," LaTouche said. His voice suddenly was almost a protesting whine. "I don't want to hear any more."

"You have to," Smith said gently in the moonlight.

Compassionately.

"It's time."

The words seemed to snap LaTouche out of his dream and he looked again at his watch. "Sixty seconds," he said, "and we attack."

Smith sighed and looked at the stars.

"No, Joseph," he said. "There will be no attack. There is no one to attack."

"The Germans," LaTouche said. His stomach now was stained black with spreading panic as a drop of ink permeates a blotter. A cold breeze blew down the hill.

"There are no Germans," Smith said, "and you know it. You've known it for a long time now, and that's why you're here in the front lines."

"Or," he added laughing, "what you have chosen to call the front lines."

Scalloped clouds scudded across the face of the German moon, and LaTouche sat up abruptly in the slit trench as if there were indeed no Germans. He stared at Private Smith through a night clouded now to the color of tarnished pewter.

"Who are you?" he demanded fiercely.

"You," Smith said, "I'm you."

"No," LaTouche said huskily, "No, you're not."

"You see," the replacement said, "you deny the fact without questioning the rationality of the statement. And that is because you know and have always known. Those nights when you were in your teens coming home late from a date in—what was it you called that town?—yes, Fall River. Those nights when the streets were empty and there was no one but you, your footfalls ringing hollow on the pavement and the yellow street lights falling across the house fronts, and behind that the night sky. And you thought then, "How false it all looks, how like the scenery for a play before the actors come on."

LaTouche got to his feet as the moon came out from behind the clouds again. He stood in fatal silhouette, unmindful of the tactical situation.

"Stop it," he said. The wind sang down through the vineyard sadly, and the clouds raced and tumbled in the sky over the Rhineland.

"Stop it yourself," Smith said quietly. "I'm only the part of your mind that knows. Stop me if you can."

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LaTouche rubbed his forehead savagely and his helmet fell to the ground.

"You can't," Smith said. "This is the way the world ends."

"T. S. Eliot," LaTouche said harshly, grasping at the familiar line.

"Yes," Smith agreed quietly. "You did say that. There is no one called Eliot."

Sergeant LaTouche ground both fists in his eyes as a child will do when awakened. He stood tall in the bright moonlight at the edge of the shallow trench and glared at Smith.

"You're lying," he said, "you're an enemy agent. We had them in the Ardennes."

Smith waved a negligent hand across the night air.

"Yes," he said. "All those names and places, all those people. They're fading now, Joseph. Our mind is no longer powerful enough to maintain these fantasies."

They stared at each other in a long moment of utter silence.

"Why aren't your Germans firing, Joseph?" Smith said at length.

LaTouche stared about him wildly, then glanced up through the vineyard to where the moon danced on the ridge.

He screamed:

"Corporal Kelly?"

His mind see-sawed back into a cautious awareness of where he was. He threw himself to the ground and crawled, knees and elbows, knees and elbows through the dry silver grass to the next slit trench at the foot of the hill. Smith was obviously a psycho and LaTouche needed help. Kelly and Pfc. Piper were twenty yards away behind a dug-in, air-cooled machine gun. LaTouche seized on these comfortable facts and caressed them with his mind. Base of fire, he thought happily in the shimmering moonlight, a pivotal point of defense in case the platoon was driven back or attacked from the flanks.

"These," he muttered to himself, "are the things that are real." He slithered over the hummocks of the earth in frenzied haste. He never would have believed that he could have been so shaken by the ravings of a madman even though he had heard for years that that sort of thing could sometimes spread its contagion to rational minds.

There was no slit trench containing a machine gun. There was no Corporal Kelly, no Pfc. Piper. There was only the bare, unscarred earth under a moon that was a little dimmer than it had been.

"Smith," LaTouche called. He got to his feet slowly and stared down at the ground beneath his boots. Stupidly.

"Yes?"

LaTouche turned and walked back to his own slit trench slowly, his feet dragging. The light kept

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fading. The slit trench was not there. Smith was not there.

"Smith?" LaTouche called.

"Yes," Smith said, "I'm here."

"Where?"

"Where I've always been. You know where."

"Oh," LaTouche said. "Yes."

He stood for a moment, helmetless and silent, his eyes turned toward the stars. There seemed to be fewer of them in the sky than before. He listened to the wind.

"What do I do now?"

"It doesn't matter too much," Smith answered. "If you want to walk up through the vineyard, you can look at the river in the moonlight, while there is still a river in the moonlight. Would you like that?"

"Yes," LaTouche said. He turned his face toward the top of the hill where the moon swam mistily like a dying lamp in the sky. He began to walk up the slope toward the ridge, with the wind in his face.

"Smith," he said as he neared the top of the ridge.

"Yes?"

"Aren't there any others? Anyone at all?"

"Only you," Smith said. "All of it, the music, the literature, the lovemaking and the memories were all you."

"They never happened?" LaTouche said. He stood now at the top of the ridge and saw the river, a faint violet-silver highway in the dark valley below

"What does 'happened' mean?" Smith said. And even his voice grew fainter.

LaTouche looked behind him down the slope. There was no slope. There was no vineyard. There was nothing.

"Smith," LaTouche cried brokenly, "I'm lonely." The river slowly faded from sight and then there was no valley. And then there were no stars. Or moon.

Smith's voice came from a great distance.

"You always were. That's why you made all those puppets and doll houses."

"What comes next?" LaTouche said in the utter darkness. There was no ground under his boots.

"I'm not sure," Smith's words were a far whisper now, "a lot of darkness and then maybe something growing bright. I'm only sure up to this point."

LaTouche raised his hand to wipe the sweat from his face.

There was no face.

The armored cars stood along the moonlit road like huge silver turtles, white puffs coming from the exhausts of their idling engines. A hundred yards above them the vineyard sparkled frostily under the studded sky. The First Sergeant looked at his wrist watch and saw that it was two minutes before the platoon was to sweep up the hill and clean out the vineyard. He leaned against

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the stern of an armored car listening to the soft crackle and chatter of the radio.

"Who's that?"

The First Sergeant snatched his carbine from the back of the armored car and leveled it at the pale figure that sidled around the front end of the vehicle.

"It's me," the man said softly, "Smith."

The First Sergeant relaxed. He was a tall, heavy man with a scarred, brutal face.

"The replacement," he said. He spat on the road. "I thought I sent you out to LaTouche."

"You did," Smith said.

"Well?"

"He's in the vineyard," Smith said quietly, "wandering around."

"You're crazy," the other man snapped, "there's nobody up in the vineyard but Germans."

"There's not one German in the vineyard," Smith said. He put down his rifle and leaned against the armored car.

A low, throbbing howl like that of an animal came on the wind from the direction of the hill in the night.

"What the hell is that?" the First Sergeant gasped.

"I expect it's Sergeant LaTouche," Smith said, "trying to contact somebody. He's still finding it hard to believe that there's nobody there. Some go one way, some go another."

"You mean he blew his top?" the First Sergeant said. "Combat fatigue?"

Smith smiled.

"Something like that," he said. "Now a violent man like you would never choose to go out that way, would you?"

"What do you mean?" the First Sergeant said. "Get back there and help them bring in LaTouche before I boot your tail."

"There is no LaTouche," Smith said.

"Listen, Buddy," the First Sergeant said, "I got a hill full of krauts to take care of—and a sick platoon sergeant wandering around in the middle of them, so—"

Smith smiled his white and narrow smile again in the dusty light of the moon. The First Sergeant's heavy, scarred features, a face that looked like a collection of sharp rocks, cleared of all expression. He took a step forward in the silver wash of moonlight so that he loomed over the slender replacement. His shadow placed the smaller man in darkness.

"All right, soldier," he said softly, "I want to know what you're talking about, and I want it spit out by the numbers."

"It's simple," the velvet, insinuating voice said out of the shadows. "LaTouche knows. There is no war. It's all in your mind."

A small, barely perceptible tremor shook the tall man's massive body. He stood silent for a mo-

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ment, and then a rich, low chuckle rumbled in his chest.

"All right, Smith," he said contemptuously, "you're dismissed."

The slim man in the shadows didn't move.

The First Sergeant stepped forward again swiftly and the replacement cringed beneath his height.

"I know you now, soldier," he said, "I just never seen you before. Get out of my outfit." He kept moving forward through the moonlight and the replacement was forced backwards across the road, away from the armored cars and into the ditch, until he stood, a pale blur against the edge of the forest.

The First Sergeant's voice swelled in his chest, he tipped slightly forward so that his muscular weight was balanced on the balls of his feet. Thus he had stood, dominant and glowering across the dust and glare of drill fields for twenty years.

"MOVE OUT!" he roared.

The pale blur vanished in the darkness of the woods.

Two cooks ran around a corner of the kitchen truck at the end of the column.

"What's the matter, Sarge?" one Corporal-cook asked fearfully.

The First Sergeant looked down at him arrogantly.

"Nothin'," he said. "Tell Corporal Henry to go out in the vineyard and get Sergeant LaTouche."

In a few minutes, just before the attack up the hill got under way, LaTouche was brought in between two troopers of Headquarters platoon. He stood, docile and helmetless on the road, his eyes shining and vacant. The First Sergeant glanced at him and winced.

"Take him back to the rear," he said.

"O.K." Corporal Henry said. "I couldn't find that replacement up there. That Smith. What happened to him?"

"Missing in action," the First Sergeant said curtly, "write him off the roster."

Corporal Henry turned away. LaTouche turned with him like a mechanical doll.

"Corporal," the First Sergeant snapped. Henry turned.

"Don't ever mention that replacement's name again."

The stars were reflected on the crystal of his wrist watch as he checked the time, and then slowly raised a whistle to his lips.

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Fitimtar, an unwilling immigrant to the dismal outpost planet, considered herself a queen. She was not joking—nor, indeed, without resources.

Send Her Victorious

by Evelyn E. Smith

"I've tried to be tolerant," Gaither said. "I've even tried to be nice. But it's awfully hard to integrate a collective being into any society."

"Sort of a one-man minority group, eh?" Pollack grinned.

"One *woman*," Gaither corrected him. "In this instance, anyway. Fitimtar has chosen to be considered as of the feminine gender."

"Why must she be considered as anything at all?" Pollack asked lazily.

"Because of the forms," the governor explained. "Dozens of them—all to be filled out in quintuplicate. You saved a lot of bother by coming here illegally."

Pollack preferred not to change the subject. "Why did she plump for female?"

"Some analogy with bees, I believe. She's been reading up on Earth. Only displaced entity here who ever uses the library. The rest just yell for bigger and better tridis."

"Sees herself as queen, I suppose," Pollack surmised.

"Queen *and* subjects. She—" Gaither broke off, as a dumpy feminine figure approached, carrying an umbrella over her head, or what looked like her head. When she came closer, Pollack saw that she wasn't *a* being at all, but a number of tiny blue creatures clinging together compactly. The umbrella was just an umbrella.

"Good morning, Fitimtar," Gaither greeted her with a wide diplomatic smile.

"It is not at *all* a good morning," Fitimtar declared, in a voice surprisingly human to issue from no throat. "Much too hot and *excessively* sticky."

"I'll ask the weatherman to see if he can't whip up something more to your taste, Fitimtar," Gaither laughed.

Pollack smiled. Fitimtar gave no sign of having understood that a pleasantry had been committed. "As we have reminded you on

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more than one occasion, *Mr.* Gaither, the *proper* mode of address toward us is 'your majesty,' or, informally, 'ma'am.' "

"In our democratic society," Gaither informed her, "there are no titles. We act on the assumption that each of us is one of nature's own noblemen."

"Nature is *hardly* qualified to issue patents of nobility." And she wasn't joking, Pollack saw; she meant it. She looked at him, then, and, even without visible eyes, her stare was chilling. "And who are *you,* young man? A low character of some sort, I daresay, or why would you be *here?*"

To his surprise, Pollack found himself not only getting to his feet but bowing. There was an indisputable majesty about the creature. "Well—er—ma'am, I was told that Bitterman's was a nice, quiet planet for research."

"No doubt you are engaged on some project too *odoriferous* for Terra's dainty nostrils, or too *hazardous* to allow any but non-humans or a low-ranking human official or two to be exposed to it." She and Gaither regarded each other with hauteur.

"My work is neither smelly nor dangerous—" Pollack began.

She stopped him with an imperious wave of her extrusion. "Don't apologize to *us.* This is not *our* planet. We are here by sufferance of the *benevolent* Terrestrial government, and we *ought* to be grateful for the mere fact of our continued existence."

An undiplomatic querulousness crept into Gaither's voice. "After all, Fitimtar, we—the Terrestrial government, that is—didn't blow up your sun."

"That's as may be," she said darkly. "The careless way you cavort about space in those *machines* of yours, it's a wonder *more* accidents haven't occurred."

She turned back to Pollack. "Once we had a planet of our own, young man—a small world, but very exclusive. Then our sun went nova, as a result of what may or may not have been the *natural* course of events. Just before that melancholy event, we were removed by a Terrestrial ship and brought to this dismal outpost to moulder. We would rather have gone up with our sun." Unfurling her umbrella, she stalked off.

"I should have warned you," Gaither said, "that she's telepathic to some degree. That is, completly telepathic among her selves, but I think she can pick up our thoughts a little, too."

Pollack was dismayed. "But that means she might know what I'll be doing!"

"Oh, even if she does, she wouldn't tell!" Gaither said confidently.

"True blue to the core," Pollack smiled, gazing after the ultramarine figure as it retreated regally across the mud.

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"I tried that on her," Gaither sighed. "She didn't get it. And the difficulty wasn't semantic—she's an excellent linguist—just no sense of humor."

Pollack was still anxious about his work. "Is she at all mechanically inclined?"

"My dear fellow, you heard the way she spoke about machines. Your secret will be safe with her. What *is* your secret, by the way?"

"Time travel."

Gaither seemed glad to hear it. "I was afraid it was some sort of weapon. Naturally, I wouldn't let an old school chum down, but I'd hate to get myself into serious trouble." He poured another perkle juice for both of them. "Why can't you do your work on one of the Home Planets, by the way? Not that I'm not delighted to have you here—nobody else on the planet just now except Fitimtar and a lot of fish—but time travel does seem to be quite an unexceptional field of research."

"I'm too good; that's why!" Pollack saw Gaither's face and laughed. "No, honestly I'm not a sorehead. I had a working model—sweetest little machine you ever saw. And two-dimensional; not only went forward and backward in time but forward and backward in space, so you could get any*where* as well as any*when* . . ."

"Why slink off to outworlds then, instead of having asteroids named in your honor?"

Pollack took a sip of his drink. "There was a drawback," he admitted. "If you went back in time, you didn't stay *you;* you merged with the identity of someone else of that era—someone akin to you in personality. . . . Oh," he added, as Gaither opened his mouth, "you could come back whenever you wanted, but it played hob with the nervous system of whoever you'd . . . possessed. Well, with the Orientalists in power back Home and feeling the way they do about ancestors . . . !"

Gaither nodded. "I know. If I'd had the right ancestors, I'd be head of one of the big colonies, instead of governor of this stinking little refugee camp."

Work on Pollack's machine didn't proceed as rapidly as he'd expected, owing to Fitimtar's affability. He had made too good an impression. "You're the *only* one on this planet that we can talk to," she informed him. "Mr. Gaither is *quite* impossible, and the other displaced individuals look pretty *scaly* to us—"

"Well, Bitterman's is mostly water, so it was the best place to bring the Fiblor fish people, after their planet got contaminated." She sniffed. He attempted a bit of diplomacy. "The Fibloringefaltr may be a bit uncouth, but they have good hearts."

"The Fibloringefaltr are *utter* barbarians," Fitimtar said crisply. "Why, since we've been here,

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we haven't *dared* separate into our component parts. Individually (I don't mind telling *you*), we're so susceptible that we might pick up *anything* from those fish—bad language, coarse gestures, and so forth."

And the sum total of all her parts shuddered. "We're growing positively atrophied through lack of discrete exercise; we might as well be one of those *vulgar* single entities. Present company excepted, of course," she added politely. "At least you are respectable, unlike the Fibloringefaltr, who are—"

"A bit fishy, eh?"

She stared at him without comprehension. A collective unity needed to be humorless in order to exist, he decided. Otherwise, the individuals who made up its parts would start joking among themselves, and soon there would be anarchy.

"But the most shocking thing about them is—" she dropped her voice "—that they actually go about unclad, for one would *hardly* account scales as clothing."

Pollack couldn't help giving her a penetrating look. "Every one of us is quietly but completely clothed from head to toe!" she snapped.

He smiled and picked up a pair of pliers. "I'm sorry, your majesty, but I really must get back to work; time's a-wasting."

Fitimtar refused to take the hint. "And how *is* your little whatyoumaycallit progressing?" she asked, giving the works a patronizing prod with the umbrella.

Pollack gave a low yelp and grabbed at the extrusion that held the umbrella.

"Unhand us, sir!" Fitimtar cried —unnecessarily, since, at his touch, the extrusion had separated into indignant individuals. "Because we have condescended to favor you with our company, that does not give you license to presume!"

Gaither offered to have her kept away from the workshop, but Pollack refused. "Poor thing's lonely; it's no life for her here on Bitterman's."

"It'd be no life for her on any planet," Gaither said bluntly. "You could hardly imagine her fitting in, say, on Earth."

No, Fitimtar could never become a part of rough, tough, bustling Earth, where no one minced his words, and everybody dressed as he pleased, even to not dressing at all. Fitimtar could never fit in anywhere. "How about finding her another planet to herself?" Pollack suggested.

"The government's budget wouldn't run to anything like that. Besides, though she'd never admit it, I don't think she'd be satisfied with her own company now. She's become—" Gaither smiled "—well, cosmopolitan, you might say."

That made Pollack feel even sorrier for poor old Fitimtar. She reminded him of his oldest aunt,

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even to sharing her interest in ancient history. Fitimtar also took a warm interest in Pollack's work, and no male is utterly unresponsive to appreciation from a feminine audience, no matter how otherworldly. His heart warmed toward the old entity. "I'll call the machine *The Fitimtar,* after you," he said, as he bolted the last panel into place. "Tomorrow you can christen it with a bottle of perkle juice, but be careful not to get any in the steering gear."

"We . . . are honored," she said, a trace of reserve in her tone. He wondered why; he would have thought she'd be delighted.

The next day he found out why. The time machine was gone, and so was Fitimtar. The presumption was that they had departed together.

"Why didn't you lock the machine up?" Gaither raged. "I told you she was telepathic!"

"You also told me she wasn't mechanically minded."

"She didn't have to be. All she had to do was pick the operating instructions out of your mind." He moaned softly. "Where in the universe could she have wanted to go?"

"Back to her old planet, maybe," Pollack proposed, not too hopefully. "A long time before the sun went nova."

Gaither shook his head. "Her horizons have broadened; she wouldn't be satisfied with that kind of static existence. But what did she do? She's *sui generis,* so she couldn't find anybody else of her own kind to merge with."

"Maybe she took on a human identity," Pollack suggested. "She's an awful lot like my aunt."

"Oh, well," Gaither sighed, "I suppose we'll never know. You can't build another machine and track her down, because I'm not going to run the risk of having more materials smuggled out here for your nefarious experiments."

"Even if you were willing to run the risk," Pollack informed him, "I don't have the money."

Several days later, the time machine, its controls set on automatic, reappeared in its shed. Tied to its instrument panel with mauve ribbon was a note which bore the following words in a delicate copperplate handwriting: "Circumstances may have forced me to stoop to deceit, but never to larceny . . . F."

"Well, now you have the machine, that puts a different face on the matter," Gaither declared. "You're going to have to go back in the past and find her . . . Bit of a job, I should imagine," he added maliciously.

"Not as bad as all that," Pollack smiled. "We can send the paper back to Earth and have it analyzed. That should give its approximate provenance."

The note returned with its own accompanying note. "If you're

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planning to fake nineteenth-century English manuscripts, remember to *age* the paper next time."

It didn't take Pollack long to locate Fitimtar in nineteenth-century England, but it was almost impossible for him to gain access to her by any legitimate means. At least he had to use the time machine, backing down from the future until one of the rare times that she was alone.

She must have been expecting him, for she did not get up from her chair—or even look surprised at his appearance. Strange how little her human form had changed her: she was still her old self, composed, dumpy, and regal in her shawl and crinoline. "We cannot say that we are *overjoyed* to see you, Mr. Pollack," she said, in a voice curiously like the old one. "However, you were kind to us when we were in *reduced* circumstances, and so we shall not refuse you an audience."

"Fitimtar—"

"Formerly, we had to request that you use a suitable form of address," she reminded him. "Now we're in a position to *command* it."

"But, your majesty, you can't expect to stay on here like this as a—a human for the rest of your—her—life!"

"We *can*," she replied equably, "and, what is more, we *shall*. We are sure that we shall fill our position as it *deserves* to be filled." She was stern and regal.

"But how can you, who once were so many, be content to be one?"

"Within myself, I am still many," she said, her composure unruffled. "It is the *spirit* that matters, Mr. Pollack, not the *body*."

It was outrageous, absurd—but there was nothing he could do. If only she could be brought to realize how ridiculous the whole thing was. But she had no sense of humor. He tried, desperately: "Your majesty, don't you think this joke has gone far enough?" And he gave a few tentative giggles.

The face opposite him remained calm.

"It may well be a joke to *you*, Mr. Pollack," Queen Victoria said, rising to her feet to signify that the audience was over, "but *we* are not amused."

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We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed . . . if that's any comfort to you.

The Price

by Algis Budrys

THERE WERE THREE MEN; ONE fat, one thin, one very old. They sat together behind a long desk, with scratch pads and pencils before them, passing notes back and forth to each other while they questioned him. The very old one spoke most often, in a voice full of the anticipation of death.

"Your name?"

The ugly hunchback in the gray tunic glowered back at them from his uncomfortable wooden chair. "No name," he growled. His knotted fingers were spread to cup his knees. His thick jaw was prognathous even at rest. Now, with the muscles bunched under his ears and his thick neck jutting forward, his lower teeth were exposed.

"You must have a name."

"I must nothing. Give me a cigarette."

The fat man whispered gently: "We'll give you a cigarette if you tell us your name."

"Rumpelstiltskin," the hunchback hissed. He extended his hand. "The cigarette."

The thin man slid a silver case across the table. The hunchback snatched it up, bit the filter from the end of the cigarette he took, spat it out on the floor with a jerk of his head, and thrust the case into the front of his tunic. He glared at the thin man. "A match."

The thin man licked his lips, fumbled in a pocket, and brought out a silver lighter to match the case. The old man covered the thin man's hand with his own.

"I am in charge here," he said to the hunchback. "I am the President."

"You have been that too long. The match."

The President hopelessly released the thin man's hand. The lighter slid across the table. The hunchback touched its flame to the frayed cigarette end. Then he slid it back, grinning without visible mirth. The thin man looked down at it without picking it up.

"I'm not as old as you," the President said. "No one is as old as you."

"You say."

"The records show. You were found in 1882, in Minskva Guv-

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bernya, and taken to the Czar. You told him no more than you will tell us, and you were put away in a cell without light or heat until you would talk. You were taken out of the cell in 1918, questioned, and treated similarly, for the same reason. In 1941, you were turned over to a research team for study. In 1956, you were placed in the Vorkuta labor camp. In 1963 you were again made the subject of study, this time in Berlin. The assembled records show you learned more from your examiners than they learned from you. They learned nothing."

The hunchback grinned again. "A equals pi r squared. *Judex ergo cum sedebit, quidquid latet apparebit, nil inultum remanebit.*"

"Don't be so pleased with yourself," the fat man whispered, gently.

The President went on. "In 1967, you were taken to Geneva. In 1970, you were given shelter by the Benedictine monks in Berne, remaining with them through most of the Seven Decades' War. Now you're here. You've been here for the past eight months, and you have been treated well."

The hunchback ground his cigarette into the desk's polished mahogany.

"We need you," the thin man said. "You must help us."

"I must nothing." He pulled the case out of his tunic, took a fresh cigarette, spat out the end, and held the case in his hand. "A match."

The thin man slid the lighter across the desk. The hunchback lit his cigarette and returned the lighter. He ground out the cigarette and took another. "A match." The thin man pushed the lighter across the desk, and the hunchback cackled in glee.

There were heavy drapes on the windows behind the President, who gestured abruptly. The thin man yanked them aside.

"Look," the President said. Sputtering fires and swirling ropes of smoke cast their lights and shadows through the window and into the room. "It's all like that, everywhere. We can't put it out, but if we could learn what let you walk through it out of Europe . . ."

The hunchback grinned slyly and swallowed the glowing coal from the end of his cigarette. He looked from one man to the other with great delight.

The fat man whispered: "I'll pull you apart with chains and hooks."

The hunchback said: "Once I was straight and tall."

"For God's sake!" the President cried out, "there are no more than a hundred of us left!"

"What do you want?" the thin man asked. "Money? Women?"

The hunchback took the cigarette case and crumpled it over between his hands. He threw it on

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the table before the thin man. Then he sat back and smiled, and smiled. "I will tell you how you may be saved."

"What do you want?" the thin man whispered breathily.

"Nothing! Nothing!" the hunchback cackled. "I will tell you from the mercy of my own good heart."

"Tell us," the fat man cried. "Tell us, then!"

"*Wait*—" It was the President, stumbling over his own urgency. "Wait—this thing, this process—this treatment—will it turn us into something like you?

The hunchback smiled, and grinned, and laughed. "Inside and out. Yes."

The President hid his face in his hands. Then he gestured importunately to the thin man. "Draw the curtains! Quickly!" His voice was hoarse with emotion.

But the fat man dragged the President from his chair and held him so that he was forced to face the open window. "Look out at it," he said harshly. "Look."

The President hung from the fat man's hands for a moment, and then he mumbled:

"All right. Tell us, hunchback."

And the hunchback leaped from his chair up onto the top of the table. He stamped his feet in joy and bayed his triumph from his open throat. He leaped and capered, his boots splintering the oil-rubbed veneer of the table and scattering the scratch pads. The pencils flew into the corners of the room, and the three men had to wait for him to finish.

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One thing an astronaut will have over Earthbound travelers is an unobstructed view of where he came from—for at least part of his trip. But for what part of the trip . . . how far can he go without losing sight of home?

THE SIGHT OF HOME

by Isaac Asimov

IN REAL LIFE, MAN HAS JUST hit the Moon with an unmanned rocket, but in science-fiction, we have been bouncing among the far stars for many long years. And often's the time that an author has wrenched at his reader's heart-strings by having some homesick astronaut on the planet of a distant sun lift his eyes to the strange skies in order to locate the tiny speck that is "Sol" . . . home, sweet home, across the frigid vastness of space.

With my own callous heart-strings untugged, the thing that occurs to me is: How far away can said astronaut be and still make out the sight of home? For that matter, we can make it general and ask: How far away can the inhabitant of any star be and still make out the sight of the star in whose planetary system he was born.

This, of course, depends on how bright the particular star is. I say *is* and not *seems*. From where we sit, here on Earth's surface, we see stars of all gradations of brightness. That brightness is partly due to the star's particular luminosity, but is also partly due to the distance it happens to be from us. A star not particularly bright, as stars go, might seem a brilliant specimen to us because it is relatively close; while a star much brighter, but also much more distant, might seem trivial in comparison.

Consider the two stars Alpha Centauri and Capella, for instance. Both are about equally bright in appearance, with magnitudes of about 0.1 and 0.2 re-

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spectively. (Remember that the lower the magnitude, the brighter the star, and that each unit decrease of magnitude is equal to a multiplication of 2.52 in brightness.)

However, the two stars are not the same distance from us. Alpha Centauri is the closest of all stars and is only 1.3 parsecs from us. (I am giving all distances in parsecs in this article for a reason I will shortly explain. To guide you, a parsec is equal to 3.26 light-years, or to 19,150,000,000,000 miles.) Capella, on the other hand, is 14 parsecs from us, or over 10 times the distance of Alpha Centauri.

Since the intensity of light decreases as the square of the distance, the light of Capella has had a chance to decrease by 10 x 10 or 100 times more than has the light of Alpha Centauri. Since Capella ends by appearing as bright as Alpha Centauri, it must in reality be 100 times as bright.

If we know a star's distance, we can correct for it. We can calculate what its brightness would be if it were located at some standard distance from us. The distance actually used by astronomers as standard in this connection is 10 parsecs (which is why I am giving all distances as parsecs).

Thus, the *apparent magnitude* (the actual brightness of a star as we see it) of Alpha Centauri is 0.1 and of Capella is 0.2. The *absolute magnitude*, however (the brightness as it would appear if a star were exactly 10 parsecs away) is 4.8 for Alpha Centauri and —0.6 for Capella.

The Sun, by the way, is just about as bright as Alpha Centauri. Its absolute magnitude is 4.86. Both are average, run-of-the-mill stars.

It is possible to relate absolute magnitude, apparent magnitude and distance by means of the following simple equation:

$$M = m + 5 - 5 \log D$$

where M is the absolute magnitude of a star, m is the apparent magnitude and D is the distance in parsecs.[1] At the standard distance of 10 parsecs the value of d *is* 10 and log 10 equals 1. The equation becomes $M = m + 5 - 5$, or $M = m$. The equation at least checks by telling us that at the standard distance of 10 parsecs the apparent magnitude is equal to the absolute magnitude.

But let's use the equation for something more significant. Our astronaut is on a planet of another star and he wants to point out the Sun to the local gentry. He wants to do so with pride, so

[1] I found this formula on page 268 of INTRODUCTION TO ASTRONOMY by Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin (Prentice-Hall.) I mention this because I enjoyed the book, which is unusually clear and interestingly written. I recommend it, happily, to all of you.

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he would like to have it a first-magnitude star.

The equation will tell us how far away we can be in order that this might be possible. The absolute magnitude of the Sun (*M*) is 4.86. That can't be changed. We want the apparent magnitude to be 1, so we substitute that for *m*. We now calculate for *D* which turns out to be equal to 1.7 parsecs.

Only Alpha Centauri is within 1.7 parsecs of the Sun. This means that only from a planet in the Alpha Centauri system can the Sun be seen as a first-magnitude star. Sirius, for instance, is very close to us (less than 3 parsecs away, close enough to be by far the brightest star in the sky, though only 1/6 as bright as Capella in actuality) and yet even from the Sirian system, the Sun would be seen as only a second-magnitude star.

Well, then, his pride chastened, but homesick nevertheless, our astronaut might abandon first-magnitude pretentions and be willing to settle for any glimpse, however faint, of home.

Since a star of apparent magnitude 6.5 can just barely be made out by a pair of excellent eyes under ideal seeing conditions, let's make *m* equal to 6.5 instead of to 1 and calculate a new value for *D*. Now it comes out as equal to 20 parsecs. The Sun is down to the very limit of naked-eye visibility at a distance of 20 parsecs.

Of course, it is visible for this distance in all directions (assuming that it is not obscured by dust-clouds or anything like that) so that it can be seen by naked eye anywhere in a sphere of which the Sun is the center and which has a radius of 20 parsecs. The volume of such a sphere is about 32,000 cubic parsecs.

This sounds like a lot but in the neighborhood of our Sun, the density of stars (or multiple stars) is about 4½ per 100 cubic parsecs. Within the visibility sphere of the Sun there are, therefore, about 1450 stars or multiple star systems. Since the Galaxy contains about a hundred billion stars, the number of stellar systems from which we can be seen at all, by naked eye, represents an insignificant percentage of those in the Galaxy.

Or put it another way. The Galaxy is about 30,000 parsecs across the full width of its lens-shape. The range of visibility of the Sun is only about 1/800 of this.

Obviously, if we are going to go flitting here and there in the Galaxy, we can just take it for granted that when we lift our tear-filled, homesick eyes to the alien heavens, a sight of home is what we will not get.

Of course, let's not be too sorry for ourselves. There are stars far less luminous than the Sun and therefore far less visible.

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The least luminous star known is one which is listed in the books as "Companion of BD + 4°4048," which I suggest we call (for purposes of this article only) "Joe." Now "Joe" has an absolute magnitude of 19.2. It is only two millionths as bright as the Sun and although it is only about 6 parsecs from us, it is barely visible in a good large telescope.

Using the equation, it turns out that at a distance of 0.03 parsecs, "Joe" is just barely visible to the naked eye. This means that if "Joe" were put in the place of the Sun, it would disappear from naked-eye sight at a distance from us just six times as great as that of the planet, Pluto.

It is unlikely that anywhere in the Galaxy there exist two stars that close together, unless, of course, they form part of a multiple star system. (And "Joe" *is* part of a multiple star system; one which includes the star BD + 4°4048, of which it is the "Companion.")

It follows that the existence of a star like "Joe" would be a complete secret to any race of beings not possessing telescopes and not living on a planet that actually revolves about "Joe" or about its companion. No man from "Joe" could ever get a sight of home from any planet outsde his own multiple system; from any planet at all.

On the other hand, consider stars brighter than the Sun. Sirius, with an absolute magnitude of 1.36, can be made out at a distance of 100 parsecs, while Capella, with an absolute magnitude of —0.6, could be seen as far off as 260 parsecs. Sirius could be seen through a volume of space 600 times and Capella through a volume over 2,000 times as great as that through which the Sun can be seen.

Nor is Capella the most luminous star by any means. Of all the stars visible to the naked eye, Rigel is just about the most luminous. It has an absolute magnitude of —5.8, which makes it over 20,000 times as luminous as the Sun and rather more than 100 times as luminous as even bright Capella.

Rigel can be seen by the naked eye from a distance of 2,900 parsecs in any direction, which means over a range of 1/5 the width of the Galaxy. This is quite respectable.

It means that over a large section of the Galaxy, we might at least count on identifying our Sun by its spectacular neighbor. We could say to the local Rotarians, "Oh, well you can't see our Sun from here, but it's pretty close to Rigel, that star over there, the one you call Bjfxlpt."

But the record for steady day-in and day-out luminosity is not held by any member of our own Galaxy. There is a star called S Doradus in the Large Magellanic

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Cloud (which is a kind of satellite galaxy of our own, about 50,000 parsecs away) and S Doradus has an absolute magnitude of —9. It can be seen by naked eye for a distance of 12,500 parsecs—more than the width of its own small galaxy, and nearly the full length of our own large one.

Of course, no normal star can compete in brightness with a star that explodes. Exploding stars fall into two classes. First there are ordinary novae, which every million years or so blow off one percent or so of their mass and grow several thousand times brighter (temporarily) when they do. In between blowoffs, they lead fairly normal lives as ordinary stars. Such novae may reach absolute magnitudes of —9, which makes them only as bright as S Doradus is all the time, but then S Doradus is a most unusual star. Certainly, the novae are a million times as luminous as are average stars like our Sun.

But then there are supernovae. These are stars that go completely to smash in one big explosion, releasing as much energy in a second as the Sun does in 60 years. Most of their mass is blown off, and what is left is converted to a white dwarf. The upper limit of their absolute magnitude reaches anywhere between —14 and —17, so that a large supernova can be 1,500 times as luminous as even S Doradus.

If we imagined a good supernova reaching an absolute magnitude of —17, it could be seen by naked eye, at peak brightness, for a distance of 500,000 parsecs. In other words, such a supernova flaring up anywhere in our Galaxy could be seen by naked eye anywhere else in our Galaxy (except where obscured by interstellar dust). It could even be seen in our satellite Galaxies, the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds.

However, the distance between our Galaxy and the nearest full-sized neighbor, the Andromeda galaxy, is about 700,000 parsecs. It follows that supernova in other large Galaxies cannot be seen by naked eye. Any supernova that is visible by naked eye, then, must be located in our own Galaxy, or, at most, in the Magellanic Clouds.

Now astronomers have studied novae which have flared up in our Galaxy. For instance there was a nova in the constellation Hercules in 1934 that rose from telescopic obscurity to the 2nd magnitude (say as bright as the North Star) in a matter of days, and stayed near that brightness for three months. In 1942, a nova in the constellation reached first magnitude (as bright as Arcturus) for a month.

But novae aren't unusual—an average of 20 flare out per year per Galaxy.

Supernovae are different breeds altogether and astronomers would

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love to get data on them. Unfortunately, they are much rarer. It is estimated that about 3 supernovae appear per galaxy per millennium; that is, 1 supernova for every 7,000 ordinary novae.

Naturally, a supernova can be best studied if it appears in our own Galaxy, and astronomers are waiting for one to appear.

Actually, there is a chance that our Galaxy has had its expected 3 supernovae in the course of the last thousand years. At least there were three very bright novae which have been sighted by naked eye in that interval.

The first of these was sighted in 1054 A.D., but only by Chinese and Japanese astronomers. Despite the fact that a new star had appeared in the sky, rivalling and even suprassing Venus in brightness, so bright in fact that it was visible by day over a period of many weeks, so bright that it cast a shadow;—despite all this, no European references to it have survived. (Europe was just beginning to struggle out of the night of the Dark Ages and astronomy was then at a low ebb.)

From the position in the constellation Taurus, recorded by the orientals, modern astronomers had a pretty good notion as to where to look for any remnants of the nova. In 1844, the English astronomer William Parsons located an odd object in the appropriate place. It was a tiny star barely visible in a good telescope (it eventually turned out to be a white dwarf) surrounded by an irregular mass of glowing gas. Because the gas was irregular, with claw-like projections, the object was named the Crab Nebula.

Continued observation over decades showed the gas was expanding. Spectroscopic data revealed the true rate of expansion and that combined with the apparent rate revealed the distance of the Crab Nebula to be about 1,600 parsecs. Assuming that the gas had been exploded outward at some time in the past, it was possible to calculate backward to see when that explosion had taken place (from the present position and rate of expansion of the gas). It turns out the explosion took place about 900 years ago. There seems no doubt that the Crab Nebula is what remains of the Nova of 1054.

For the nova to be brighter than Venus it must have had a peak apparent magnitude of -5. Substituting that for m in the equation and 1,600 for D, the value of M, the absolute magnitude, works out to be just about -16. From this and from the white-dwarf remnant and the gassy explosion, there can be no doubt that the nova of 1054 was a true supernova and one which took place within our Galaxy.

In 1572, a new star appeared in the constellation, Cassiopeia.

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It also outshone Venus and was visible by day. This time, it was observed by Europeans. In fact, the last and most famous of all naked-eye astronomers, Tycho Brahe, observed it as a young man and wrote a book about it entitled *De Nova Stella* (*Concerning the New Star*) and it is from that title that the word, nova, for new stars, comes.

In 1604, still another new star appeared, this time in the constellation, Serpens. It was not quite as bright as the noval of 1572 and perhaps only grew as bright as Mars at its brightest (say an apparent magnitude of −2.5.) It was observed by another great astronomer, Johann Kepler, who had been Tycho's assistant in the latter's final years.

Now the question is, were the novae of 1572 and 1604 supernovae? Unlike the case of the nova of 1054, no white dwarf, no nebulosity, no anything has been located in the spots reported by Tycho and Kepler. The direct evidence of supernova-hood is missing. Perhaps they were only ordinary novae.

Well, if they were ordinary novae with absolute magnitudes of only −9, then the Nova of 1572 must have been about 60 parsecs distant, no more, if it was to surpass Venus in brightness. The Nova of 1604 would be 200 parsecs distance. Stars that close could scarcely fail to be seen with modern telescopes, even if they were dim, it seems to me. (Of course, if they ended up as dim as "Joe" they might not be seen, but that level of dimness is most unlikely.)

Most astronomers seem satisfied that the novae of 1572 and 1604 were supernovae in our own Galaxy, and this brings up an irony of astronomical history. Two supernovae appeared in the space of a single generation, the generation just before the invention of the telescope, and not one supernova has appeared in our Galaxy in the nine generations since.

Even a small telescope could have plotted the position of the supernovae more exactly and made it somewhat more likely that the remnants could now be located. If the supernovae had appeared after the invention of the spectroscope, things would have been rosier still for happy little astronomers.

As it is, supernovae *have* been observed since Kepler's time, about 50 altogether, but only in other galaxies, with the result that the apparent brightness was so low that little detail could be made out in the spectra.

The closest and best supernova to have appeared since 1604 showed up in 1885 in the Andromeda galaxy, our neighbor. It reached an apparent magnitude of 7. (It was not visible, you will note, to the naked eye. As I said

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before, only supernovae in our own Galaxy or in the Magellanic Clouds are visible to the naked eye.) Since the Andromeda galaxy lies at a distance of 700,000 parsecs, the absolute magnitude of the supernova comes out to just a bit brighter than −17. It was about a tenth as bright as the entire galaxy that contained it. Since the Andromeda galaxy is perhaps five times the size of our own, you might say that this one supernova was half as bright as all the stars of the Milky Way put together—for a while, anyway.

In fact, it was the extraordinary brightness of this star that made astronomers realize that there were nova that were thousands of times brighter than run-of-the-mill nova, and thus the concept of the supernova arose.

Well, now, telescopes and spectroscopes were trained on the supernova of 1885 so that it was better studied than were the much closer ones of 1572 and 1604, but astronomers still weren't living right. Photography had not yet been applied to spectroscopy. If the supernova of 1885 had held on for 20 years more, or if it had been located 20 light-years further from Earth (so that the light would have taken 20 years longer to reach us), its spectrum could have been recorded photographically and studied in detail.

Well, astronomers can only wait. It's even money that sometime during the next century, there will be a supernova blowing its top either in our Galaxy or in the Andromeda galaxy, and this time cameras (and heaven knows what else—radio telescopes, too) will be waiting. Provided, of course, the next supernova is not old Sol—the chance of that however, is virtually nil from what little we know of supernovae.

Still, that does bring up another favorite s.f. situation—the doom of the earth by nova. There have been a number of stories in which Earth has been instantaneously puffed into gas because the Sun exploded.

But it is only the Sun (or at least a sun of an inhabited planet) that worries s.f writers. I have never seen a story which speculated on a star *without* inhabited planets going nova and the consequences of that event on a neighboring star which *did* have inhabited planets.

For instance, suppose it was not the Sun but Alpha Centauri that decided to blow up. If Alpha Centauri went nova and reached an absolute magnitude of −9, its apparent magnitude would be −13.5. It would then be two and a half times as bright as the full moon and a fine spectacle for that portion of Earth's population that lived farther south than Florida and Egypt. (It would be a new

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tourist attraction and countries like Argentina, the Union of South Africa and Australia, would clean up for a couple of months.)

Or suppose Alpha Centauri went supernova and reached an absolute magnitude of —17. Then its apparent magnitude would be —21.5 which would make it 4,000 times as bright as the full moon and actually 1/160 as bright as the sun.

Under such conditions there would be no night for any region of the earth that had Alpha Centauri in its night sky. You could read newspapers and cast shadows. With Alpha Centauri in the day sky, it would still be a clearly visible and blindingly brilliant point of light, and there would be double shadows. If a cloud passed over the Sun and left Alpha Centauri unobscured, the darker shadow would blank out, but the dimmer would remain. In fact, for a couple of months, Earth would be truly a planet of a double sun.

The total amount of energy reaching Earth would (temporarily) be increased by as much as 0.6 percent. This might have a significant effect on the weather. A large part of the Alpha Centauri radiation would be high-energy and that would probably play hob with the upper atmosphere. In short, although Alpha Centauri as supernova might not endanger life on Earth, it would certainly make things hot for us.

In fact, there's a possible background for a science fiction story here. Suppose that as a result of such a supernova at some point in the future, the radiation belts about Earth are so enlarged and intensified that for the space of a year, ships can neither approach Earth nor leave it. Suppose that the ionosphere is ionized to the point where interstellar communications break down. We are suddenly isolated at a crucial time in the history of the Galaxy and somehow we've got to get out before the year is up. So our hero—

But why should I give all this prime material to the competition? Let them think up their own crazy ideas. . . .

Addendum

I would like to consume an additional bit of space at this point to address those readers who have written to me in connection with my articles. I am an expert in nothing but speculation, so that I am particularly prone to bloopers, and I am grateful to have them pointed out to me.

For instance, in the addendum to "The Ultimate Split of the Second" (August, 1959) I stated loftily that "1 inch is equal to 254 millimeters." As a number of readers pointed out, a decimal point got lost there. I meant that an inch was equal to 25.4 millimeters.

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The other equivalents given in that same paragraph are off by the same factor of 10.

Then, in "The Height of Up" (October, 1959) I said that there are 12 shillings to the pound sterling. A slip of the mind, I'm afraid. There are 20 shillings to the pound, of course. What I meant was that there were 12 pence to the shilling.

But I am fortunate in my readers. All who have written in to point out my errors have been friendlier, perhaps, than I deserve. They always assume I really know better, and refrain from making the obvious deduction that I am not really very bright. I thank you all for your tolerance and forbearance.

I should also say that there is a definite tendency among the readers who write to absolve me from all blame and to lay the fault at the feet of the Kindly Editor. While I recognize the fact that editors are by and large sub-human, I think we ought to consider the feelings of the one here involved. He has never yet inserted a blooper into an article of mine.

Of course, he has never corrected a blooper, either—[1]

[1] *This is not the whole truth—a fact which will not be documented here out of respect for the feelings of the Good Doctor.*—THE KINDLY EDITOR

Hot Argument

Willie and his girl friend, Bea,
While working for the A. E. C.,
Got in a fight, and failed to hear
The warning of a bomb test near.
Their friends were sad to hear, no doubt,
That they had had a falling out.

—RANDALL GARRETT

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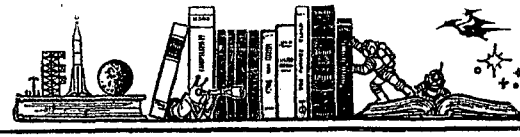
BOOKS



1924

by Damon Knight

WE, by Eugene Zamiatin (a Dutton Everyman Paperback, $1.45), is a reissue of an apocalyptic novel first published, by Dutton, in 1924. Except for a Russian version issued by an emigré group in Czechoslovakia in the late twenties, the book has never been published in the author's native language, and it is still banned in the Soviet Union.

The novel is written in the form of a diary kept by a citizen of a thousand-year-old autocracy, the United State. Names and other personal identifications have been abolished; male and female Numbers dress in identical uniforms, live in identical transparent cells of great cubical buildings of glass, rise, eat, work and return to bed at the same moment.

The trouble with this brief description of the book is that every word is true, essential, and misleading. WE is not a museum specimen, not a crude political satire, but a live & kicking masterpiece.

"We were down in the street. The avenue was crowded. On days when the weather is so beautiful, the afternoon personal hour is usually the hour of the supplementary walk. As always, the big Musical Tower was playing the March of the United State with all its pipes. The Numbers, hundreds, thousands of Numbers in light blue unifs (. . .) were walking slowly, four abreast, exaltedly keeping step. (. . .)

"Then, as this morning on the dock, again I saw, as if for the first time in my life, the impeccably straight streets, the glistening glass of the pavement, the divine parallelepipeds of the transparent dwellings, the square harmony of the grayish-blue rows of Numbers. And it seemed to me that not past generations, but I myself, had won a victory over the old god and the old life, that I myself had created all this. I felt like a tower; I was afraid to move my elbow, lest the walls, the cupola, and the machines should fall to pieces."

In such passages, and with an

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exuberant flow of mathematical analogies, the diarist conjures up the fearful joy of unfreedom. And yet, sentence by sentence, in the very midst of his hymns of praise for the United State, this dedicated Number who is building a spaceship, the *Integral,* to take the blessings of order to distant planets; this mathematician, this poet of sterility, unmasks himself in a flood of sensual imagery.

Balanced in this way between two worlds, good-humored, naive, bubbling with ideas, the diarist can at one moment show you a glimpse of a 20th-century street, and make you *see* it as an incredible and absurd spectacle of disorder; and at the next, succumb to an erotic attachment of such extraordinary power, that his betrayal of the world-state becomes perfectly credible.

This is a bouncing, lively, enormously readable book; its characters, O-, the round and patheticallly young woman who loves the diarist; R-, the Negro-lipped poet, to whom they have an amiably triangular relation; I-, the mysterious woman rebel ("again a smile, bite, and white sharp teeth"), D-himself, the diarist, all grow comfortably and affectionately familiar. The author's prose is deceptively simple, like his city of glass, which he turns with casual ease into a mirror of symbols.

"(. . .) The Morning Bell! I got up; everything looked different. Through the glass of the ceiling, through the walls, nothing could be seen but fog—fog everywhere, strange clouds, becoming heavier and nearer; the boundary between earth and sky disappeared. Everything seemed to be floating and thawing and falling. . . . Not a thing to hold on to. No houses to be seen; they were all dissolved in the fog like crystals of salt in water. On the sidewalks and inside the houses dark figures, like suspended particles in a strange milky solution, were hanging, below, above, up to the tenth floor. Everything seemed to be covered with smoke, as though a fire were raging somewhere noiselessly."

Although Zamiatin wrote this story in the early 20's, when he could already feel the Soviet monolith hardening around him; although he anticipated prefrontal lobotomy and other modern horrors; although his book shows a striking parallelism with Orwell's 1984, these are not the important facts about WE. It's a delightful and profound book; a work of art; a lasting pleasure.

THE OUTWARD URGE, by John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes (Ballantine, 35¢), chronicles the adventures of the space-faring Troons: Ticker, grandson of a World War I flyer, who helps build the first manned satellite; Michael, Ticker's son, Moon base commander; Geoffrey Trunho

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(the family emigrated to Brasil), Michael's great-grandson, Mars explorer; and George, Geoffrey's grandson, Venus explorer.

One trouble with this episodic treatment is that nothing lasts long enough: you no sooner get interested in one Troon than the authors whisk you off to another. Also, one-quarter of a paperback novel just is not enough to do justice to a planet, or even a minor satellite.

The narrative very curiously combines ingenious ideas, and some hard-headed thinking, with a rather fuzzy Wellsian sentimentality, so that whatever bite the story has is blanketed under a general feeling of well-bred good will. Nevertheless, Wyndham has lost none of his persuasive skill as a story-teller, and you may find yourself reading through to the end of the book without pausing to ask yourself whether it's improvable.

Sterling Noel, a suspense-story writer, has turned to science fiction with creditable results in WE WHO SURVIVED (Avon, 35¢). In the early chapters, Noel's world of 2203 A.D. is full of self-conscious neologisms, laid on with a trowel ("bald as a borhke ball," " 'Eat your lannie-hen,' " &c.), but once the story starts moving, most of these are forgotten; what remains is a sturdy, matter-of-fact adventure narrative, with a cast of familiar 1950 American characters.

Having correctly predicted a new ice age (caused by a cloud of cosmic dust), a small group of scientists and technicians with their families prepare to live through the first months of storms in Kansas, then dig themselves out in a "snowmobile" to make the long journey to temperate climes.

The journey itself is continuously interesting, with its succession of new problems to be solved by courage and ingenuity. But after the survivors reach their goal, the book ends on a note of apathy and regret. It's understandable that the characters should have put in all that effort, but the reader may well ask himself why he bothered.

Readers of this magazine are already familiar with Robert A. Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS (Putnam, $3.95), since it appeared here in two parts as *Starship Soldier*.

The book version is twenty thousand words longer, and, I think, a much more successful piece of work: it goes more deeply into the rationale of Heinlein's future society, which puzzled many people; and it also carries the Bug war enough farther on to suggest a conclusion. This book, probably Heinlein's most serious work in many years, is one you shouldn't miss.

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Will Worthington's first F&SF story—"Plenitude," in the issue for last November—showed only one side of his various talent. This time he turns a sardonic eye on a gentleman named Larchmoss and the unreasonable interferences he met in facing up to his own private monstrosity.

WE ARE THE CEILING

by Will Worthington

THE TERRIFYING THING ABOUT an irrational conviction, pondered Mr. Larchmoss even as he lay on the uncozy couch in Dr. Proctor's office, was that all the forces you invoked to combat it—your sense, your experience, your mature critical faculties—turned tail when they confronted the Thing, and then expressly *because* you were a rational man, a modern, civilized adult with more probity than most, your obsession shone forth like a rare diamond displayed against a black velvet ground. Whatever its outrageous form, you looked your fabulous beast in the eye, coldly, scientifically, and said "You are ridiculous," and then *It* looked right back at you with eyes the more terrible because cooler than yours, and it said "You are insane." This was the point at which your wife, your friends, your associates and finally you yourself decided that you needed help.

And this was how you found yourself at Dr. Proctor's Retreat, half stoned with some insidious sedative drug, babbling forth your confusion, lying on a couch of the kind seen in cartoons which once were funny, totally accountable for your past life, present fantods and future fears to an unsmiling stranger whose horn-rimmed glasses were too thick and so clean that a single flake of dandruff on one of the lenses would have stood out just as starkly as your own puerile obsession—your own private *monstrosity* among the dusty commonplaces of everyday life.

"Now then, Mr. Larchmoss—" it was the doctor's first interruption in perhaps half an hour, during which Larchmoss had been enjoined to talk only about events leading up to the first appearance of His Trouble— "tell me about the first recollection you have concerning these . . . ah . . . what did you call them?"

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"Troglodytes," said Mr. Larchmoss, pained at the sound of it coming from his own normally unsmiling lips. "But I use that word only as an afterthought, Dr. Proctor. I mean, it's important, I think, that I wasn't *thinking* about troglodytes as such . . . before I saw whatever it was that I've been seeing . . . I *think* . . . no dammit I know, I'm *sure* I've been seeing. Something!"

"Let's not intellectualize, Mr. Larchmoss," said the doctor as though accusing his patient of some scarcely mentionable moral trespass. "Just tell me what you *saw*."

"It was almost a month ago . . . in my own backyard. Well first I should say that I heard Moira—that's my wife—get up. I thought nothing of this. You know, sometimes . . .

"Yes, of course . . ."

"But then I heard her at the back door downstairs. At first I thought of a prowler, but Moira would wake *me* if she had a thought like that. Has dozens of times. I heard the door close, but she didn't come back upstairs. I looked through our window . . ."

Mr. Larchmoss had trouble getting on with it. That other part of his mind, the rational, the mature, the solid intervened to veto his narrative. He felt his consciousness separating like vichyssoise left too long near the freezing coil. Perhaps the drug . . .

"Yes, Mr. Larchmoss?"

"Out—up out of the barbecue pit . . ." he managed to say.

"*What* came up out of the barbecue pit, Mr. Larchmoss, and where was Mrs. Larchmoss? Did you see her?"

"I saw her. I saw her. She . . . she was helping them. Helping them up out of the barbecue pit. They—" He took a deep breath, then made a too conscious effort to block the embarrassed part of his mind, the sensible part, before plunging ahead. "They were people. Or so I thought at first. But there was a difference. They—" He fought an uprush of nausea, very real, very sour in the throat. It wasn't necessarily the drug.

"Try to go on, Mr. Larchmoss. The sooner we get these things out of our systems . . ."

"Yes. Well, when I saw them in full moonlight . . . it was full moonlight that night, you know. Well, I saw that they were dead white—almost silvery. They were like grubs, Dr. Proctor, just like white larvae you'd find *under* something—a dead log, a flat rock. And they moved. . . ."

"Never mind, Mr. Larchmoss, never mind. These things will happen." The doctor came forward with a towel. "Oh Pettigrew! Little accident here."

Miss Pettigrew, a WAC Sergeant-Major-type, entered with a basin, cloths, sponge and a bottle of what proved to be disinfectant.

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"Whoopsy-daisy, Mr. Larchmoss!" she said, grinning inanely.

The doctor pressed his interrogation before Pettigrew was through with her cheerless task. Larchmoss was torn between chagrin at his display of physical weakness and dread of the memory which had brought it on. The doctor helped a little.

"I gather, then, that these . . . *people* . . . had a way of moving which you found upsetting . . . quite literally in this case. How did they move, Mr. Larchmoss?"

"I . . . can't describe it exactly. Slowly at first. No, I'd say tentatively was a better way to describe the way they moved. Yes, *tentatively,* like people coming out of a warm place with no clothes on. But they were . . . *grub-like,* Dr. Proctor—like huge white, soft *grubs,* somehow, which by some hideous caprice of nature were shaped like human beings."

The doctor looked at Mr. Larchmoss very narrowly and for so long that the poor man could feel it. He turned and looked at the doctor.

"Why, Mr. Larchmoss, do you describe these . . . *people* in this particular way? I mean, why a hideous caprice of nature? Would you feel this way about an unfamiliar insect you found, as you suggest in your analogy, *under* something? Would an octopus or a snail or any other somewhat unfamiliar creature cause you to react in this way?"

Was there a trace of resentment in the man's tone? Oh surely not. It was just professional intentness —involvement with the problem at hand—that sort of thing. Still . . .

"I suppose their resemblance to people was what got me. It still gets me as I think back upon it. But then I get that first night mixed up with later things. Later I—"

"First," interrupted the doctor, "what happened after you saw them coming up out of your barbecue pit, as you say? What did they do? How many of them were there? Where did they go? And what did your wife do? Try to remember it all, Mr. Larchmoss."

Larchmoss felt the vichyssoise effect more strongly than before. Was it not the function of a psychiatrist to dispel delusions? Proctor was after him to report something which common sense excluded from the world of serious consideration. Was this not, in effect, acknowledgement of the content of his hallucinations as something substantial? Was he being led back down into the same abyss from which he was trying to emerge? And why did Dr. Proctor's face look as though he might be wearing that fake suntan powder? Oh can it, Larchmoss! Be a man . . . an adult!

"Well, there were six of them. That I could see. They were naked . . . white, as I told you. My

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wife helped them up out of the barbecue pit. It has . . . I *thought* it had . . . a trapdoor under the grate. Well, she helped them up as you would help old people or invalids out of a car or up a flight of steps. Then she had a pile of clothes. Mine . . . old ones. She gave them clothes and they were a long time getting into them. She helped. . . ."

He felt sick again, but this time managed to contain himself and resume. Proctor remained silent—staring through his odd spectacles. His eyes looked different. Oh never mind!

"I got a good look at them while they struggled into my old clothes. Their eyes . . . huge and pale. And I could *hear* them . . . their language . . ."

"I suppose you are going to tell me that they spoke proto-Greek or Old Norse," said Dr. Proctor, inclining his head and looking at his patient over the rims of his glasses. Mr. Larchmoss did not at first detect the note of sarcasm.

"I would not recognize either of those languages, naturally. No, it was . . . like nothing I've ever heard, except perhaps a phonograph record slowing down—growling but with queer *twists* of sound at the ends of their words . . . or phrases. Like extreme middle-western 'r's, but—" Larchmoss checked himself and felt foolish—"but why Greek or Norse. I don't quite get . . ."

"Just joshing, Mr. Larchmoss. It would fit the Gestalt, that's all. Proto-Greek for exhumed classic gods and goddesses, something like Norse for Trolls. You have heard of these legendary denizens of the underworld, of course. Almost every literate person has at one time or another. The point is, Mr. Larchmoss, that there are reasons for the recurrence of such fantasies though the history of human consciousness. It is one of those themes which keeps cropping up from time to time. The forms . . . the traditions change somewhat, but basically the idea is the same. It has to do with what we call the collective unconscious. Fundamentally men have always feared the same things. Beneath the surface of historical change, including scientific enlightenment and twentieth century 'common sense,' the old fears remain intact and very much alive. To explain our most persistent myths we must take a long, penetrating look at what is persistent in ourselves. Our personal anxieties, inadequacy . . ."

Mr. Larchmoss felt his attention relaxing and the sensation was agreeable. The doctor droned on about ambivalent feelings relative to the womb, the earth, death, dread of dissolution and at one with dread, fascination. The sun ricocheted from the upper surfaces of the venetian blinds above the couch, cozier now, and the

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edges of the shadows and solid shapes in the room softened Light and sound and even the pervading smell of disinfectant were muted and the pattern of his immediate surroundings no longer thrust itself at his inflamed senses. It was not the drug, nor was it merely the somnolence of late afternoon; it was Dr. Proctor. He made such complete sense. It was good—*good* to be made to feel foolish about one's childish delusions. He forced his attention back to the doctor.

". . . disparity in your ages," he was saying. "Mrs. Larchmoss is fifteen years your junior. There is nothing inherently wrong in this but your own thinking makes it so. You feel a gulf sometimes, and this is no more than the fear that your years have made, or will make you inadequate to her youthful needs. We older men do not like to look directly at an emptiness, real or fancied, within ourselves. We externalize these gnawing intimations of change—the relentlessness of time. We reject the strangeness of what we are, at any and every moment of existence, becoming. It is more flattering to see the external world and its people as wrong and strange, to construct dark conspiracies about ourselves." He consulted a folder before him, apparently without finding the information he was looking for. "How old did you say you were, Mr. Larchmoss?"

"Forty-nine."

"Ah yes," sighed the doctor, a bit ruefully but smiling in some sort of recognition. "That is an age . . . yes. It is we who are strange, Mr. Larchmoss."

He did not *feel* strange. Not now, anyway. It was true that he wasn't sure just yet. There was still an obscure corner of his mind where the familiar and even the loved persisted in merging with the eldritch, the bizarre and the horrible—magnetic particles on a glass surface. Moira. Garden. Overpowering scent not of flowers but of dank earth. Darkness and near transparent whiteness. Youthflesh —grubflesh. Damned nonsense!

"The prognosis is excellent, Mr. Larchmoss. I think that you are beginning to see your problem already. I can tell by your pattern of reluctances . . ." The doctor rose to his feet and removed the thick, over-polished spectacles. He had the most ordinary eyes Larchmoss had ever seen, and a hearty recreation director's smile—the let's-get-out-and-sweat quality which goes with whistles on cords around the neck and with slightly sour sweatshirts. It was not a quality which Larchmoss admired at other times, but now it was reassuring.

"I think that you can stand outside of this thing and look at it coolly . . . well *almost* coolly, Mr. Larchmoss. A few weeks of rest and quiet. Sleep. Good food. No alcohol. You will look back on

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a time when you confused nightmares with realities, and you will laugh."

He did not feel hilarious yet, but he managed a smile.

"Of course."

"And in the meantime, I want you to mingle with the others here. They are all nice respectable people like yourself, Mr. Larchmoss . . ."

"Oh, I'm sure they are."

". . . and I want you to notice, too, that you are not alone in this thing. These delusions are like fads, Mr. Larchmoss. The common causes are submerged, but you will see that most of our guests are suffering from exactly the same ideas that brought you here. If it isn't one thing it's another, Mr. Larchmoss. Not more than six months ago it was invading Martians. My oldest patient, Mrs. Fenster, still suffers from anarchists. Furtive men with beards and round bombs were the bugaboo of *her* generation. Now it's Troglodytes, or whatever you choose to call them. Do you see?"

"In a way." He rose from the couch and laughed nervously.

"You are not yet a well man, Mr. Larchmoss. I think you realize that, don't you? You still feel a little . . . well, *uncertain,* and when you are still in this mildly disturbed phase it is quite possible that some very slight thing could thrust you back—cause a relapse. It would have to be a slight thing, though. Some subtle stimulus meaningful only to you. But I think you are well enough to mingle with the others. Do you good. I want you to talk to them and then decide for *yourself* which the sickest ones are."

The doctor stepped to the door and opened it. "We'll have another little chat tomorrow, Mr. Larchmoss. We'll lick this thing, won't we?"

At another time it would have been cloying and embarrassing. Now Larchmoss felt bolstered by the man's very banality. It was like a strong broth.

"Where did *yours* come up out of, Larchmoss?" asked the first patient to approach him. It was an unnerving introduction in spite of his own psychological preparations for such an encounter. His own defenses and those suggested by Dr. Proctor seemed shaky.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Larchmoss.

"Your Trogs, of course. Don't tell me you haven't seen Trogs. We've all seen them. That's why we're here. Except old lady Fenster and her anarchists, of course. She thinks that beefy nurse, Miss Pettigrew, is Emma Goldman. She's *sick.*"

"Well yes!" said Larchmoss, at a loss for better. He did not like this person. He was what another generation, in their unequivocal fashion, would call a "creep."

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Pointed face under shroudy brows. Close-set eyes framed in lines of tension. Dark facets with self-pity shining out of them. He was the too-familiar type whose life has been governed, foreshortened, frustrated and exploited by a vast, omnipotent *They*. He was the archetypal anti-hero of the Western World. Still, there would be no getting rid of him. Perhaps one could learn.

"Don't you grasp the situation, Larchmoss? They're clever. God, they're clever! They bring us here for a purpose."

"Well yes," said Mr. Larchmoss again, wondering if it would ever again be possible to respond in any other way.

"We're supposed to think that *we* are the crazy ones and that this is an ordinary sanitarium and we're here to be cured."

Mr. Larchmoss balked at saying "Well yes," again.

"I've been in and out of this place half a dozen times, you know. We are brought here for the express purpose of being convinced that we're . . . *seeing things*. Well we *are*, damnit! Don't you see? There *are* Troglodytes! Always have been. Older than humanity. I tell you the earth is heaving with 'em like billions of mice under a huge sheet. They're *real*, Larchmoss, real as you and I. . . ."

Oiliness gone, he was now in panic. Larchmoss could not decide whether it was best to speak to the man, reason with him, or just be quiet and let him rave. He looked about for the reassuring sight of a nurse or an orderly but none was in evidence. The "creep" clutched the sleeve of Larchmoss' lounging robe.

"I've seen 'em coming out of the West Branch Outflow, Larchmoss. I've talked to others here, responsible people. They've seen 'em in tunnels, subways, mines, caves, sewers. . . . We don't know how many of 'em there are. And they're *among* us this very minute, Larchmoss. They infiltrate. Why my *own wife* . . . my *own wife*, Larchmoss! She's one of 'em. We just don't know until it's too late. They pass for people But, *my own little wife, Larchmoss!*"

Swiftly and silently Miss Pettigrew swept towards them along the porch. She must have been watching the conversation from the window or the screen door. Waiting for the "creep" to reach the manic stage. She carried a needle, its tip cradled in a gob of moist cotton. So quickly did she work that she was mopping the punctured spot on the man's arm before he realized that she was there.

"Oh fiddle-dee-dee, Mr. Krausmeyer!" She smiled upon Larchmoss and explained blandly that "poor Mr. Krausmeyer has had a long day."

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Nevertheless, thought Larchmoss as Krausmeyer was being led away somewhere, there goes a bit of myself. Ah, well . . . time and rest and—

"Don't forget, Larchmoss!" It was Krausmeyer. He had torn himself away from the nurse. "Remember what I say. We have to stick together, Larchmoss. Pretend to go along with 'em. That's the only way. The only way. They *need* us. As long as we're around they can operate right under our noses and everyone will think *we're* nuts, and if we don't stick together *we'll* think we're nuts. We are their frontier, Larchmoss. We are the ceiling. . . ."

But Krausmeyer went limp, and Miss Pettigrew was right there to catch him.

"But for the grace—" said Larchmoss aloud.

Dinner was at five-thirty, and pleasant enough. He shared a table with an elderly man named Verge or Burge, who was agreeable except for some rather earthy theories about the food, which he expressed over the gentle protests of Miss Pettigrew. The fourth at the table was old Mrs. Fenster, who talked to him earnestly about the Haymarket Affair. He agreed that it never should have happened. It was revivifying to find himself in the position of comparative stability, humoring another who was confused. His appetite was not robust but he managed to eat enough to induce a satisfying digestive glow, a mundane sensation which was expressly what he needed.

Moira was waiting for him on the sunporch with Dr. Proctor.

"Looks better already, wouldn't you say, Mrs. Larchmoss?" said the doctor, grinning his recreation-director grin. "Not too long this evening, please. We need lots of rest for a while."

"Of course, doctor," said Moira, rising to meet him.

"Talking is rather difficult at this stage," said Larchmoss after they had stood looking at one another in silence for a long minute.

"There is no need, dear. Just to know that you're all right. You just worked too hard, dear, and I blame myself for that. You know I do."

Larchmoss denied that anything was her fault and she insisted that it was, and after this theme had been rallied several times they groped about in the summer evening air for nice, smooth, bland, nonirritant subjects to discuss, and they smoked cigarettes, which Moira had to light, and watched the bluish clouds of smoke pirouette over the green lawn outside and disappear among the poplar trees lining the driveway. Such places—the nice ones—always had rows of poplars. He joked about this, and it made Moira look away quickly.

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"What are those beautiful red flowers there by the drive?" she asked quickly, pointing as though at something which might run away if not apprehended immediately.

"Don't know, dear. You're the gardener in the family."

Dr. Proctor appeared again, silently on his crepe soles. Was it really necessary for them to move about that way?

"I think we'd better call it a night, folks," said the doctor. "May I see you to your car, Mrs. Larchmoss?"

They embraced while Dr. Proctor beamed happily from the sidelines.

"Only till tomorrow," Moira said, squeezing her husband's hand.

Larchmoss watched his wife and the doctor walk across the lawn towards the driveway. He supposed that they would be talking about him, but it was only to be expected. No point in working up resentments over that. He was a . . . patient, after all. Still, if he could only hear a little. Just a word . . .

He was on the point of sitting down in one of the lounge chairs when the slight thing happened. He heard Moira exclaim in delight at the flower border and she and the doctor went that way pointing and gesticulating. Then he saw that she didn't care about the flowers at all. He saw the doctor stoop and plunge his fingers into the soil; then Moira plunged both her hands into the ground and lifted a great clump of the dark, dank earth, smelled it, tasted it and finally buried her face in it as though washing. The doctor laughed and Larchmoss could hear his voice across the summer evening air. The language . . .

He was halfway across the lawn before nurse Pettigrew tackled him. Part of him heard the other part screaming as she plunged the needle into his arm. Part screamed while the other listened, petrified, and the nurse just laughed.

'Oh fiddle-dee-dee, Mr. Larchmoss!"

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Mr. Moore's newest is a compassionate tale about the daughter of a moonshiner, and a stranger who was dressed in a suit that looked like blue skin and possessed a thumb that was most extraordinarily green.

THE FELLOW WHO MARRIED THE MAXILL GIRL

by Ward Moore

AFTER A COUPLE OF WEEKS Nan began to understand him a little. Nan was the third oldest Maxill girl. The wild one, they called her in Henryton, not forgetting they had said the same of Gladys and later Muriel; Gladys now high in the Eastern Star, and Muriel, married to Henryton's leading hardware and furniture dealer—Muriel, mother of the sweetest twins in Evarts County. But they said it of Nan with more assurance.

Everyone knew Maxill had bought the old Jameson place, eighty of the most worthless acres ever to break a farmer's heart, the year after Cal Coolidge became President, because he—Malcolm Maxill that is, not Mr. Coolidge—wanted an out-of-the-way location for a still. Naturally they looked for his six kids, all girls, to run wild with such a background. Not that Henryton, or Evarts County either, for that matter, upheld Prohibition or admired Andrew Volstead. But buying a so-called half-pint now and then (striking a blow for liberty, the more robust males called it, a trifle shamefacedly) was one thing, and condoning moonshining and bootlegging in their midst was something else again.

Of course moonshining was in the past now. Prohibition had been dead for two years, and people wondered more how Maxill was going to make a living from his worthless land than over his morals. But Nan had been seen necking in automobiles (a Velie and a Rickenbacker) with different boys, and heavens knew on how many unobserved occasions she'd done the same, and honestly, commented Henryton—not to say Evarts County—maybe the

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juvenile authorities should be notified, because Nan was still underage. Besides, she had a mean, sullen look, defiant and rebellious, that showed she needed a strong hand.

No one thought of going to her father. Everybody knew he kept a loaded shotgun handy (gossips said that was how Muriel—empty chatter—those *lovely* twins) and had run more than one nosey character off his place. Henryton people tended to mind their own business—they had plenty to think about with the Depression—so talk of the authorities remained just talk. Still, it isolated Nan Maxill more than ever and encouraged her wildness.

He—the fellow; they hadnt any other name for him for a long time; all the Maxills knew who was meant when one of them used the pronoun—was found by Josey in the south pasture, which hadnt been a pasture for years and years, just a hummocky, lumpy expanse of weeds and obstinate brush. Josey was eleven and shy, a birthmark down the left side of her face was complicated from time to time by almost every possible affliction of the skin, so that she had begun hiding from strangers at the age of seven and never found reason to break the pattern.

She hadnt hidden from him. All her natural childish curiosity about people, long suppresssed, overwhelmed by their greedy inquisitiveness over her blemishes, seemed stirred by the sight of him. Though, as everyone said afterward, he didnt really look different. He was oddly dressed, but Henryton had seen boys from Spokane or San Francisco who dressed even more oddly, and his complexion had a peculiar vitality and sheen and at the same time a delicacy which contrasted with those of the farmers accustomed to sun all day, or those who hid in shadowed stores or offices to earn dollars.

"Who're you?" asked Josey. "My Dad don't like fellers snooping around. What's your name? Maybe you better get out; he's got a gun and b*elieve* me he can use it. What's that stuff youre wearing? Looks like it was your skin, only blue, not something sewed at all. I can sew real good myself; it relaxes me, so I'll probably never be a delinquent. Youre not deaf and dumb, are you Mister? There's a man in Henryton's deaf dumb *and* blind. People buy pencils from him and drop pennies and nickels in his hat. Say, why don't you say something? My Dad'll sure run you off. That's a funny kind of humming. Can you whistle? There's a piece they got a record of in school—I can whistle the whole thing. It's called *Flight of the Bumblebee*. Want to hear me? Like this . . . Gee, you don't need to look so miserable. I guess

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you just don't like music. That's too bad. I thought when you were humming like that—the way you are now too, and I think it sounds real nice even if you don't like my whistle—you must like music. All us Maxills do. My Dad can play the fiddle better than anybody . . ."

She told Nan later (because Nan had been the sister who had most to do with taking care of her) he hadnt seemed just not to understand, like a Mexican or something, but acted as though he wouldnt have caught on even if he'd known the meaning of every single word. He came close, still humming, though a different tune if you could call it that; it was more like snatches of odd melodies. He put his hands—she didnt notice them particularly then—very gently on her face. The touch made her feel good.

He walked with her to the house—it seemed right and natural—with his arm lightly around her shoulder. "He don't talk," she told Nan; "he don't even whistle or sing. Just hums, sort of. Suppose Dad'll run him off. Maybe he's hungry."

"Your face—" began Nan, then swallowed and looked from the child to him. She was in bad humor, frowning, ready to ask what he wanted or tell him sharply to be off. "Go wash your face," she ordered Josey, staring after her as she obediently took down the enamelled basin and filled it. The muscles in Nan's cheeks relaxed. "Come in," she said to him; "there's a hot apple pie."

He stood there, humming, making no move, smiling pleasantly. Involuntarily she smiled back, though she had been in a mood and the shock of Josey's face was still in her mind. It was hard to tell his age; he didn't look as though he shaved, but there was no adolescent down, and his eyes had mature assurance. She puzzled over the strangely light color; darkandhandsome had always been an indivisible word to her, yet she thought them and the pale hair quite exciting.

"Come in," she repeated; "there's a hot apple pie."

He looked at her, at the kitchen behind her, at the unpromising acres over his shoulder. You might have thought he'd never seen such ordinary sights before. She took his sleeve—the feel of it sent prickles through her thumb and fingers as though she'd touched something live instead of inert, touched silk expecting cotton, metal anticipating wool—and pulled him through the door. He didnt hold back nor, once inside, seem ill at ease. He merely acted—strange. As though he didnt know a chair was for sitting on or a spoon was for cutting the flaky crust and scooping up the juicy sticky drippy filling, or even that the pie was for putting in the

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mouth, tasting, chewing, swallowing, eating. The horrid thought of mental deficiency crossed her mind, to be dismissed by the sight of him, so unequivocally whole and invulnerable. Still . . .

Josey ran to her. "Nan, Nan—I looked in the mirror! Look at me. My face!"

Nan nodded, swallowing again, glancing swiftly at him and away. "It must have been that last prescription. Or else youre just growing out of it, baby."

"The—the *thing!* It's lighter. Faded."

The birthmark, angry and purple, had receded in size and color. The skin around it was clear and vibrant. Nan put her fingers wonderingly on the smooth cheek and stooped to kiss her sister. "I'm so happy."

He sat there, humming again. Oh what a silly, Nan thought cheerfully. "Here," she said, in the manner of one addressing an idiot or a foreigner. "Eat. See. Like this. Eat."

Obediently he put the guided spoon of pie into his mouth. She was relieved when he disposed of it normally; she had been afraid she might have to direct each spoonful. At least he didnt have to be fed like a baby. She hesitated a fraction of a second before pouring a glass of milk, feeling small for doing so. She wasnt mean—none of the Maxills were; their faults usually sprang from an excess of generosity—but the cow was drying up, she was a hard one to breed, her father wasnt much of a hand with animals anyway, and the kids needed the milk, to say nothing of the butter Nan preferred to lard for baking. But it would be shameful to grudge—

He had put the glass to his lips, evidently more at home with methods of drinking than of eating, and taken a single sip before sputtering, choking and spitting. Nan was furious, equally at the waste and the manners, until she noticed his hands for the first time. They were strong-looking, perhaps longer than ordinary. On each there was a thumb and three fingers. The three fingers were widely spaced; there was no sign of deformity or amputation. He was simply eight- instead of ten-fingered.

Nan Maxill was a softhearted girl. She had never drowned a kitten nor trapped a mouse in her life. She forgot her annoyance instantly. "Oh, poor man!" she exclaimed.

There was no question he must stay and her father must be cozened into allowing it. Ordinary decency—contrary to Maxill custom—demanded hospitality. And if they let him go, her unsatisfied curiosity would torment her for years. On his part he showed no inclination to leave, continuing to examine each object and person

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with interest. His humming wasnt monotonous or tiresome. Though it sounded like no music she had ever heard, it was agreeable enough for her to try to imitate it. She found it deceptively complicated and hard—almost impossible for her to reproduce.

His reaction was enthusiastic surprise. He hummed, she hummed, he hummed back joyously. Briefly the Maxill kitchen echoed a strange, unearthly duet. Then—at least so it seemed to Nan—he was demanding more, far more, than she was able to give. His tones soared away on subtle scales she couldnt possibly follow. She fell silent; after a questioning interval, so did he.

Malcolm Maxill came home in ill-humor. He worked for his son-inlaw during the winter and for a month or so in summer; his natural irritation at this undignified role was not lessened by the hardware merchant's insinuations that this employment was in the manner of family charity: who else in Evarts County would hire an ex-bootlegger? Maxill looked to the day he could sell the farm—it was clear of mortgages since it would have been inconvenient in his former profession to have bankers scrutinizing his affairs—and work for himself again. But even good farms were hard to sell in times like these and there were no offers on the eighty acres. More to give an impression to an unlikely prospective buyer that the place had potentialities than in hope of profit, he kept the cow, some pigs and chickens, planted twenty acres or so each spring to corn it never paid to harvest, and looked with disgust on the decayed orchard which was good only for firewood—for which he couldnt get back the cost of cutting.

He stared belligerently at the fellow. "What do you want around here?"

The stranger hummed. Nan and Josey started explaining at the same time. Jessie and Janet begged, "Oh Daddy, please."

"All right, all right," growled their father. "Let him stay a couple of days if youre all so hot about it. I suppose at least he can do the chores for his board and maybe cut down a few of those old appletrees. Can you milk?" he asked the fellow. "Huh; forgot he's a dummy. OK, come along; soon find out whether you can or not."

The girls went with them, Nan carrying the milkpail and tactfully guiding the stranger. Sheery the cow was fenced out rather than fenced in: she had the run of the farm except for the cornfield and the scrubby kitchen garden. She was not bedded down in the barn in summer; she was milked wherever she was found. Half-Jersey, half-Guernsey (and half anybody's guess, Malcolm Maxill said sour-

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ly), her milk was rich with cream but it had been too long since she last freshened and the neighboring bulls had never earned their stud fee, though their owners didnt return it when she failed to calve.

Maxill set the pail under Sherry's udder. "Go ahead," he urged, "let's see you milk her." The fellow just stood there, looking interested, humming. "Wouldnt you know it? Can't milk." He squatted down disgustedly, gave a perfunctory brush of his hand against the dangling teats, and began pulling the milk, squit, squit, shish, down into the pail.

The fellow reached out his four-fingered hand and stroked the cow's flank. City man or not, at least he wasnt scared of animals. Of course Sherry wasnt balky or mean; she hardly ever kicked over the pail or swished her tail real hard in the milker's eyes. Still it took confidence (or ignorance) to walk around her left side and touch the bag from which Maxill was drawing, slish, slish, slish, the evening milk.

Nan knew her father was no farmer and that a real one would be milking Sherry only once a day by now, drying her up, since she yielded little more than three quarts. But Maxill knew you were supposed to milk a cow twice a day, just as he knew how long to let mash ferment and he was no chemist either. He went by rules.

"Be darned," exclaimed Maxill, who seldom swore in front of his children. "That's the most she's given in months and I aint stripped her yet."

The cow's unexpected bounty put him in good humor; he didnt seem to mind slopping the pigs nor the stranger's helplessness at throwing scratch to the chickens. (The girls usually did this anyway; Maxill's presence was a formality to impress the fellow with the scope and responsibilty of the chores.) He ate what Nan had cooked with cheerful appetite, remarking jovially that the dummy would be cheap to feed since he didnt touch meat, butter or milk, only bread, vegetables and water.

Maxill's jollity led him to tune up his fiddle—only Josey and Nan noted the stranger's anguish—and run through *Birmingham Jail, Beautiful Doll,* and *Dardanella.* Maxill played by ear, contemptuous of those who had to read notes. Josey whistled (after an apologetic glance, Jessie played her mouthorgan, Janet performed expertly with comb and toilet-paper. "You'd think," grunted Maxill, "with his humming he could give us a tune himself. How about it?" And he offered the fiddle.

The fellow looked at the fiddle as though it were explosive. He put it down on the table as fast as he could and backed away. Nan grieved at this evidence of mental

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deficiency; Jessie and Janet giggled; Malcolm Maxill twirled his finger at his temple; even Josey smiled ruefully.

Then the fiddle began playing. Not playing really, because the bow lay unmoving beside it and the strings didnt vibrate. But music came out of the sound holes, uncertainly at first, then with swelling assurance. It resembled the fellow's humming except that it was infinitely more complicated and moving. . . .

Next morning Maxill took the fellow down to the orchard, the girls tagging along. They weren't going to miss the possibility of more miracles, though now everyone had had a chance to think things over, the Maxills weren't so sure they'd actually heard the fiddle, or if they had, that it hadn't been by some perfectly explicable trick or illusion. Still, if he could seem to make it play without touching it, maybe he could do similar things with the ax.

Maxill hacked at a dead limb. The ax bounded back from the wood. The tree was not diseased or rotten, just old and neglected. Most of the branches were dead but sap still ran in the trunk, as shown by a few boughs on which a handful of fruit had set, and there was new growth on the tips. Like the rest of the orchard, the tree wasn't worth saving. The ax swung again and again; the branch broke off. Maxill nodded and handed the ax to the fellow.

The fellow hummed, looked at Maxill, the girls, the ax. He dropped the tool and walked over to the tree, fingering the rough bark, the corns, the gnarly outcrop of the roots, the leaves and twigs over his head. Nan halfway expected the tree to rearrange itself into cordwood, neatly split and stacked. Nothing happened, nothing at all.

"Yah! Dummy can't milk, slop pigs, feed chickens or cut wood. If it cost anything to feed him he wouldn't be worth his keep. All he can do is hum and play tricks."

"We'll do the chores this morning," Nan offered tactfully. They did them most mornings, and evenings too, but it was a convention that their father did all the man's work and left them free to concentrate on feminine pursuits. Thoughtful girls, they saved his face.

Nan couldnt believe there was nothing irrevocably wrong with the fellow. He used his eight fingers as dextrously as anyone used ten; more so, it seemed. He wouldnt feed the pigs but he caught on fast to gathering eggs, reaching under the hens without disturbing them at all. He couldnt milk but he stood by Sherry's side while Nan did. The cow's production was still up; there was a lot more than yesterday morning.

After the chores he returned to

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the orchard—without the ax. Nan sent Josey to see what he was up to. "He's going to every tree on the place," Josey reported; "just looking at them and touching them. Not doing anything useful. And you know what? He eats grass and weeds."

"Chews on them, you mean."

"No I don't. He eats them, honest. Handfuls. And he touched my —the thing on my face. I ran right away to look in the mirror, and you can hardly see it in the shade."

"I'm glad it's fading," said Nan. "Only don't be disappointed if it comes back. It's nothing to worry about. And I'm sure his touching you had nothing to do with it. Just coincidence."

It took the fellow three days to go through the orchard, fooling around with every one of the old trees. By the end of the third day Sherry was giving two full gallons of milk, they were gathering more eggs than usual in the season when laying normally fell off, and Josey's birthmark had practically disappeared, even in full sunlight. Malcolm Maxill grumbled at the fellow's uselessness but he never said straight out that he had to move on, so everything was all right.

After the orchard (the girls went, separately and collectively, to see what he was doing; they returned no wiser) he started on the cornfield. Maxill had planted late, not merely from lack of enthusiasm for husbandry but, possessing no tractor or plow, he had to wait till those who hired out their rigs finished their own sowing. The ground had been dry; the seed had taken overlong to swell and germinate; when the tender gray-green sheaves spiralled through the hard earth, the hot sun had scorched and warped them. While the neighboring fields were already in pale tassel, his dwarfed rows barely revealed the beginning of stunted spikes.

The fellow took even longer with the corn than the orchard. By now Nan realized his humming wasnt tunes at all, just his way of talking. It was a little disheartening, making him seem more alien than ever. If he'd been Italian or Portugee she could have learned the language; if he'd been a Chinaman she could have found out how to eat with chopsticks. A man who spoke notes instead of words was a problem for a girl.

Just the same, after a couple of weeks she began to understand him a little. By this time they were getting four gallons a day from the cow, more eggs than they ever had in early spring, and Josey's complexion was like a baby's. Maxill brought home a radio someone traded in at his soninlaw's store and they had fun getting all sorts of distant stations. When the fellow came close and they werent tuned in, it played the same kind of

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music the fiddle had the first night. They were getting used to it now; it didnt seem so strange or even —Malcolm Maxill's word—so longhaired. It made them feel better, stronger, kinder, more loving.

She understood—what? That he was not as other men, born in places with familiar names, speaking familiar speech, doing things in customary ways? All this she knew already. The humming told her where he came from and how; it was no more comprehensible and relevant afterward than before. Another planet, another star, another galaxy—what were these concepts to Nan Maxill, the disciplinary problem of Henryton Union High, who had read novels in her Science class? His name, as near as she could translate the hum, was Ash; what did it matter if he was born on Alpha Centauri, Mars, or an unnamed earth a billion light-years off?

He was humble, conscious of inferiority. He could do none of the things in which his race was so proficient. Not for him were abstract problems insoluble by electronic brains, philosophical speculation reaching either to lunacy or enlightenment, the invention of new means to create or transmute matter. He was, so he admitted and her heart filled the gaps her intellect failed to bridge, a throwback, an atavism, a creature unable to catch the progress of his kind. In a world of science, of synthetic foods and telekinesis, of final divorce from the elementary processes of nature, he had been born a farmer.

He could make things grow—in a civilization where that talent was no longer useful. He could combat sickness—in a race that had developed congenital immunity to disease. His gifts were those his species had once needed; they had outgrown the need a million generations back.

He did not pour out his confusion to Nan in a single steady flow. Only as he acquired words and she began to distinguish between his tones did their communication reach toward comprehension. Even when he was thoroughly proficient in her language and she could use his crudely, there remained so much beyond her grasp. He explained patiently over and over the technique of controlling sounds without directly touching the instrument as he had done with the fiddle and radio; she could not follow him. What he had done to Josey's face might as well have been expounded in Sanskrit.

It was still more impossible for her to envision the ways in which Ash was inferior to his fellows. That his humming—any music he produced—so beguiling and ethereal to her, was only a dissonance, a childish babble, a lisping, stuttering cacophony, was preposterous. Spaceships she could imagine,

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but not instantaneous transmission of unharmed living matter through a void millions of parsecs across.

While they learned from each other the corn ripened. This was no crop to plow under or let blacken with mildew in the field. The blighted sheaves now stood head-high, the broad leaves sickling gracefully downward, exposing and protecting the two ears on every stalk. And what ears they were! Twice as long and twice as fat as any grown in Evarts County within memory, full of perfect kernels right to the bluntly rounded tips, without a single dry or wormy row. The county agricultural agent, hearing rumors, drove over to scotch them; he walked through the field for hours, shaking his head, mumbling to himself, pinching his arm. Maxill sold the crop for a price that was unbelievable, even with the check in his hand.

The meager scattering of fruit ripened. Since the coming of Ash, the trees had sent forth new wood at a great rate. Young leaves hid the scars of age: the dead wood thrusting jaggedly, nakedly upward, the still-living but sterile boughs. Under the lush foliage the girls discovered the fruit. Ash's touch had been too late for the cherries, apricots, plums, early peaches, though those trees were flourishing in their new growth with abundant promise for the coming year. But the apples, pears and winter peaches were more astonishing than the corn.

There were few; nothing could have added new blossoms, fertilized them, or set the fruit, but the few were enormous. The apples were large as cantaloupes, the pears twice the size of normal pears, the peaches bigger than any peach could be. (Maxill exhibited specimens at the County Fair and swept all the first prizes.) They were so huge everyone assumed they must be mealy and tasteless, easily spoiled. Juice spurted from them at the bite, their flesh was firm and tangy, their taste and plumpness kept through the winter.

Nan Maxill faced the problem. Ash was properly a gift to all the people of the world. There was none who couldnt learn from him; all would benefit by what they learned. Scientists could understand what she couldnt; piece together the hints of matters above Ash's own head. The impetus he could give to technology would make the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Centuries seem stagnant periods. Musicians and philologists could be pushed to amazing discoveries. Farmers could benefit most of all. Under his guidance dead sands and unused spaces would be rich with food; many if not all wars might be avoided. To keep him on the farm in Evarts County would be cheating humanity.

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Against all this what could she set? The prosperity of the Maxills? Her growing attachment to Ash? The threat of her father selling the farm—easy enough now—and seeing the money spent until they were worse off than ever? She would have been stupid or foolish not to have considered these things. But the picture that pushed all others aside was that of Ash on the rack, victim of polite, incredulous inquisitors.

They wouldnt believe a word he said. They'd find the most convincing reasons for disregarding the evidence of the corn, the fruit, the untouched fiddle. They would subject him to psychiatric tests: intelligence, coordination, memory; physical tests—every possible prying and prodding. Where was he born, what was his full name, who were his father and mother? Unbelieving, refusing to believe, but so politely, gently, insistently: Yes, yes of course, we understand; but try and think back, Mr Uh Er Ash. Try to recall your childhood. . . .

And when they finally realized, it would be worse, not better. Now this force, Mr Ash—try to remember how. . . . This equation; surely you can. . . . We know you practice telekinesis, just show us. . . . Again, please. . . . Again, please. . . . About healing sores, please explain. . . . Let's go through that revival of dying plant life once more. . . .

Now about this ultrachromatic scale. . . . Now this, now that.

Or suppose it wasnt that way at all? Suppose the peril to Ash wasnt the apelike human greed for information but the tigerish human fear and hate of the stranger? Arrest for illegal entry or whatever they wanted to call it, speeches in Congress, uproar in newspapers and over the air. Spy, saboteur, alien agent. (How do we know what he's done to what he grows? Maybe anybody who eats it will go crazy or not be able to have babies.) There were no means of deporting Ash; this didnt mean he couldnt be gotten rid of by those terrified of an invasion of which he was the forerunner. Trials, legal condemnation, protective custody, lynchers. . . .

Uncovering Ash meant disaster. Two hundred years earlier or later he could bring salvation. Not now. In this age of fear, the revelation of his existence would be an irreparable mistake. Nan knew her father wouldnt be anxious to tell who was responsible for his crops; Gladys and Muriel knew nothing except that they had a hired man who was somewhat peculiar; anyway they wouldnt call themselves to the attention of Evarts County in any controversial light. The younger kids could be treated to follow the example of their father and sisters. Besides, she was the only one in whom Ash had confided.

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That winter Maxill bought two more cows. Ancient, dry and bony, destined for the butcher's where they would have brought very little. Under Ash's care they rejuvenated from day to day, their ribs vanished beneath flesh, their eyes brightened. The small, slack bags emerged, rounded, swelled, and eventually hung as full of milk as though they had just calved.

"What I want to know is, why can't he do as much for the pigs?" he demanded of Nan, ignoring, as always except when it suited him, Ash's presence. "Hogs are way down; I could get me some bred sows cheap. He could work his hocus-pocus—I can just see what litters they'd have."

"It isnt hocus-pocus. Ash just knows more about these things than we do. And he won't do anything to help killing," Nan explained. "He won't eat meat or eggs or milk himself—"

"He did something to make the hens lay more. And look at the milk we're getting."

"The more the hens lay the further they are from the ax. The same goes for the cows. You notice nothing's improved the young cockerels. Maybe it isnt that he won't; maybe he can't do anything to get animals ready to be eaten. Ask him."

The seed catalogues began coming. Maxill had never bothered with the truck garden beyond having it plowed for the girls to sow and tend. This year he treated each pamphlet like a loveletter, gloating over the orange-icicle carrots, impudent radishes, well-born heads of lettuce on the glistening covers. Nan intercepted his rhapsody of cabbages bigger than pumpkins, watermelons too heavy for a man to lift unaided, succulent tomatoes weighing three pounds or more apiece.

And Ash was content. For the first time Nan felt the double-edged anger of women toward both exploiter and exploited. Ash ought to have some selfrespect, some ambition. He oughtnt be satisfied puttering around an old farm. With his abilities and the assurance of a superior among primitives he could be just about anything he wanted. But of course all he wanted was to be a farmer.

Maxill couldnt wait for the ground to be ready. While it was still too wet he had it plowed. Badly and at extra cost. He planted every inch of the fifty-odd available acres, to the carefully concealed amusement of his neighbors who knew the seed would rot.

Nan asked Ash, "Can you control whatever it is you do?"

"I can't make pear trees bear cucumbers or a grapevine have potatoes on its roots."

"I mean, everything doesnt have to be extra big, does it? Can you fix it so the corn is only a little bigger than usual?"

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"Why?"

Nan Maxill knew the shame of treason as she tried to explain.

"Youre using words I don't know," said Ash. "Please define: jealousy, envy, foreigner, competition, furious, suspicion and—well, begin with those."

She did the best she could. It wasnt good enough. It wasnt nearly good enough. Nan, who had been outraged at Ash's banishment, began to see how one too far behind or too far ahead might become intolerable. She could only guess what Ash represented to his people—a reminder of things better forgotten, a hint that they werent so advanced as they thought when such a one could still be born to them—but she knew what he was on earth in the year 1937: a reproach and a condemnation.

Spring winds snapped the dead wood on the fruit trees, pruning them as efficiently as a man with saw, shears and snips. The orchard could not be mistaken for a young one, the massive trunks and tall tops showed how long they had been rooted, but it was unquestionably a healthy one. The buds filled and opened, some with red-tipped unspoiled leaves, others with soft, powdery, uncountable blossoms. The shade they cast was so dense no weeds grew between the trees.

Not so in the fields. Whatever Ash had done to the soil also affected the windblown seeds lighting in and between the furrows. They came up so thickly that stem grew next to stem, roots tangled inextricably, heads rose taller and taller, reaching for unimpeded sunlight. Unless you got down on hands and knees the tiny green pencils were invisible under the network of weeds.

"Anyways," said Malcolm Maxill, "the darned things came up instead of rotting; that's going to make some of the characters around here look pretty sick. I'll have a crop two-three weeks ahead of the rest. Depression's over for the Maxills. Know what? We'll have to cultivate like heck to get rid of the weeds; I'm going to get us a tractor on time. Then we won't have to hire our plowing next year. Suppose he can learn to run a tractor?"

"He can," said Nan, ignoring Ash's presence as completely as her father. "But he won't."

"Why won't he?"

"He doesnt like machinery."

Maxill looked disgusted. "I suppose he'd be happy with a horse or a mule."

"Maybe. He still wouldnt turn the weeds under."

"Why the dickens not?"

"Ive told you before, Father. He won't have anything to do with killing."

"*Weeds?*"

"Anything. There's no use arguing; that's the way he is."

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"Darn poor way if you ask me." But he bought the tractor and many attachments for it, cultivating the corn, sweating and swearing (when the girls were out of earshot); cursing Ash who did no more about the farm than walk around touching things. Was that a way to earn a grown man's keep?

Nan was afraid he might have a stroke when he found out the mammoth products of the year before were not to be duplicated. The orchard bore beyond all expectation or reason, not a cherry, plum or apricot was undersized, misshapen or birdpecked. No blossom fell infertile, no hard green nubbin withered and dropped, no set fruit failed to mature. Branches bent almost to the ground under the weight of their loads; breezes twitched leaves aside to uncover briefly a pomologist's dream. Maxill was no more pleased than by the corn.

"Sacrificing quality for quantity," he growled. "Bring the top market price? Sure. I was counting on twice that."

Nan Maxill realized how much she herself had changed, or been changed, since the fellow came.

Her father seemed to her now like a petulant child, going into a tantrum because something he wanted—something she saw wasnt good for him—was denied. The boys she used to go out with were gluttonous infants, gurgling and slobbering their fatuous desires. The people of Henryton, of Evarts County, of—no, she corrected herself—people; people were juvenile, adolescent. News on the radio was of wars in China and Spain, massacre and bestialities in Germany, cruelties and self-defeat all over the world.

Had she unconsciously acquired Ash's viewpoint? He had no viewpoint, passed no judgments. He accepted what was all around him as he accepted what she told him: reflectively, curiously, puzzledly, but without revulsion. She had taken the attitude she thought *ought* to he his, unable to reach his detachment as he was unable to reach that of those who had exiled him here, as one who cannot distinguish between apes would put a gorilla and a chimpanzee in the same zoo cage.

As primitive characteristics were sloughed off, a price was paid for their loss. Ash's people had exchanged his ability to make things grow for a compensatory ability to create by photosynthesis and other processes. If Ash had lost the savage ability to despise and hate, had he also lost the mitigating ability to love?

Because she wanted Ash to love her.

They were married in January, which some thought odd, but the season suited Nan who wanted a "regular" wedding and at the same time a quiet one. She had ex-

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pected her father's assent at least; Ash had made him prosperous in two short years; their marriage would be insurance that he would continue to do so. But Maxill's bankaccount, his big car, the new respect Henrytown—including his soninlaw—gave him, had inflated his ideas. "Who is the fellow anyway?" he demanded. "Where'd he come from originally? What's his background?"

"Does all that matter? He's good and gentle and kind; where he came from or who his parents were doesnt change that."

"Oh, doesnt it? Maybe there's bad blood in him. Bound to come out. And he's a cripple and not right in the head besides. Why, he couldnt even talk like anybody else at first. Sure it matters: you want kids who turn out idiots with the wrong number of fingers? Maybe criminals too?"

Nan neither smiled at his passion for respectablity nor reminded him that her children would have a moonshiner and bootlegger for a grandfather. "Ash is no criminal."

Ash was no criminal, but what of other dangers? Not just children with the wrong number of fingers or differences she knew nothing of (she'd never dare let Ash be examined by a doctor for fear of what anatomical or functional differences might be revealed), but perhaps no children at all. Beings so different might well have sterile union. Or no carnal union at all. Perhaps no bond deeper than that of a man for a cat or horse. Nan didnt pretend for a second it wouldnt matter. It mattered terribly, every last perilous possibility. She was still determined to marry him.

Maxill shook his head. "There's another thing—he hasnt even got a name."

"We'll give him ours," said Nan. "We'll say he's a second cousin or something."

"Hell we will!" her father exploded. "A freak like that—"

"All right. We'll elope then, and get a place of our own. It won't be hard when anyone sees what Ash can do. And we won't have to have good land." She left it at that, giving him plenty of time to think over all the implications. He gave in. Grudgingly, angrily. But he gave in.

Ash had never gone into Henryton or showed himself except the few times he'd helped Maxill pay back a debt of work. Still everyone knew there was some sort of hired man on the farm. Gladys and Muriel knew him to nod to and that was about all; they were skeptically astonished to learn he was a remote relative "from back East" and still more amazed to hear he was marrying Nan. They thought she could do better. Then they remembered her reputation; maybe they should be glad the fellow was doing right. They counted

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the months and were shocked when a year and a half went by before Ash Maxill junior was born.

Nan had counted the months too. Some of her fears had been quickly dispelled, others persisted. She feared to look closely at her son, and the fear was not mitigated by Ash's expression of aloof interest nor the doctor's and nurses' overbright cheeriness. Her insides settled back into place as she delicately touched the tiny nose, unbelievably perfect ears, rounded head. Then she reached to lift the wrapping blanket—

"Uh . . . uhhh . . . Mrs Maxill, uh . . ."

She knew of course even before she saw them, and a great wave of defiance flowed through her. The little dimpled hands, the little rectangular feet—eight fingers, eight toes.

She wanted to shout, It's not an impediment, you idiots! Why do you need five fingers when four will do the same things more easily and skillfully, and do things no five-fingered hand will do? It wasnt physical weakness which kept her quiet—she was a strong, healthy girl and the birth had not been complicated—but the knowledge that she must hide the child's superiority as she hid Ash's, lest the ordinary ones turn on them both. She hid her face. Let them think it was anguish.

She felt a curious sympathy for her father. Malcolm Maxill was triumphant; his dire prophecies had been fulfilled; he could not restrain his gratification. At the same time it was his grandson—his flesh and blood—who was deformed. Short of betraying Ash's secret she had no way of reassuring him and even this might not console him. More than likely he would take Ash's banishment as further proof of undesirability; he did not try to hide his increasing animosity.

"You'd think," said Nan, "you'd injured him instead of doing all you have."

Ash smiled and ran his hand lightly over her shoulder. It still surprised her slightly that someone without anger, envy or hate should be capable of humor and tenderness.

"Do you expect him to be grateful?" he asked. "Have you forgotten all you told me about how people act? Anyway, I didnt do it for your father but for the sake of doing it."

"Just the same, now the baby is here, we ought to have a regular agreement. Either a share in the farm or else wages—good wages."

She knew his look of grave and honest interest so well. "Why? We have all we can eat. Your clothes wear out but your father gives you money for new ones, and the baby's too. Why—"

"Why don't your clothes wear out or get dirty?" she interrupted irrelevantly.

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He shook his head. "I don't know. I told you I didnt understand these things. Until I came here I never heard of fabrics which werent everwearing and self-cleaning."

"Anyway it doesnt matter. We ought to be independent."

He shook his head. "Why?"

Malcolm Maxill used some of the money from the bountiful crop of 1940 to buy the adjoining farm. He was indisputably a big man in Evarts County now. Three laborers worked the two farms; the house had been remodelled; a truck, two cars and a station-wagon stood in the new garage beside all the shining machinery. The banker in Henryton listened deferentially when he spoke; Muriel's husband asked his advice.

Nan saw how it chafed him to be tied to farming, beholden to Ash. When he left on the long trip to Los Angeles she knew he was trying to end his dependence, searching for a deal to put him in a business where his shrewdness, money, energy, not Ash's gifts, would make the profit. Maxill wasnt mean; if he sold the land she was sure he'd settle with Ash for enough so they could get a place of their own.

A freeway accident intervened: Malcolm Maxill was killed instantly. There was no will. The estate was divided amicably enough, Gladys and Muriel waiving practically all their share in return for Nan's taking full responsibility for the three younger girls. Ash was quite content to leave arrangements—which he regarded with the detached interest an Anglican bishop might take in a voodoo mask—to her. He clearly didnt grasp the importance of possessions and power.

He had to register for the draft but as a father in an essential occupation there was little danger of being called up; anyway he would never pass a medical examination with eight fingers. The war sent farm prices up and up; Gladys went to Washington to work for the government; Josey married a sailor home on leave.

Harvests continued bountiful, Nan noted with pleasure how other farmers came to Ash for advice and help. Since he couldnt convey his knowledge to her despite partial communication in his own tongue there was no use trying with others. He never refused his aid; he simply limited it to visiting the poor growth, sick animal or doubtful field, talking platitudes from agricultural bulletins while his hands were busy. Afterward, so naturally that they were only amazed at the wisdom of the trite advice, the beasts recovered, the crop flourished, the sterile ground bore.

Her faint fear of little Ash's hands becoming a handicap after all was dissipated. He could grasp,

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clutch, hold, manipulate, throw better than any other child of his age. (Some years later he became the best pitcher Evarts County had ever known; he had a facing curve no opposing batter ever caught onto.) Without precocity he talked early; he learned his father's speech so well he eventually outdistanced Nan; she listened with maternal and wifely complacency as they hummed subleties beyond her understanding.

Jessie, who took a commercial course, got a job as her brotherinlaw's secretary; Janet went East to study archaeology. After V-J Day, price-controls went off; the Maxills made more and more money. Ash stopped planting corn on the old farm. Part of the acreage he put into a new orchard, on the rest he sowed a hybrid grass of his own breeding which yielded a grain higher in protein than wheat. Young Ash was a joy; yet after seven years he remained an only child. "Why?" she asked.

"You want more children?"

"Naturally I do. Don't you?"

"It's still hard for me to understand your people's obsession with security. Security of position, ancestry or posterity. How is it possible to differentiate so jealously between one child and another because of a biological relation or the lack of it?"

For the first time Nan felt him alien. "I want *my* children."

But she had no more. The lack saddened without embittering her; she remembered how she had been bent on marrying Ash even with the chance of no children at all. And she had been right: without Ash the farm would have been worthless; her father a whining, querulous, churlish failure; she would have married the first boy who asked her after she tired of necking in cars, and would have had a husband as incapable of helping her grow and bloom as her father had been incapable with his barren acres. Even if she had known there would be no young Ash, she would still have chosen the same way.

It troubled her that Ash was unable to teach his son his farming skill. It destroyed a dream of Nan's: Ash's secret made him vulnerable; young Ash, with no secret to be extracted, could have worked his miracles for humanity without fear.

"Why can't he learn? He understands you better than I ever will."

"He may understand too much. He may have advanced beyond me. Remember, I'm a throwback, with faculties no longer needed by my people. Sports rarely breed true; he may be closer to them in some ways than I."

"Then . . . then he should be able to do some of the marvelous things they can do."

"I don't think it works that way. There's some kind of equation—not a mechanical leveling off, but

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compensatory gains and losses. I can't teach him even the simple sort of telekinesis I can do. But he can heal flesh better than I."

So a new dream supplanted the old: young Ash as a doctor, curing the diseases mankind suffered. But the boy, happy enough to exorcise warts from a playmate's hands or mend a broken bone by running his fingers over the flesh outside, wanted no such future. The overriding interest of his life was machinery. At six he had rehabilitated an old bicycle each Maxill girl had used in turn until it was worn beyond repair. Beyond any repair except young Ash's, that is. At eight he restored decrepit alarmclocks to service, at ten he could fix the tractor as well or better than the Henryton garage. Nan supposed she ought to be happy about a son who might be a great engineer or inventor; unfortunately she thought the world of freeways and nuclear weapons less desirable than the one she had known as a girl—Prohibition and Depression or not.

Could she be aging? She was just over forty; the fine lines on her face, the slight raising of the veins on her hands were far less noticeable than the same signs on girls—women—five or six years younger. Yet when she looked at Ash's smooth cheeks, unchanged since the day Josey brought him in from the south pasture, she had a qualm of apprehension.

"How old are you?" she asked him. "How old are you really?"

"As old and as young as you are."

"No," she persisted. "That's figure of speech or a way of thinking. I want to know."

"How can I put it in terms of earth years—of revolutions around this sun by this planet? It wouldnt make sense even if I knew the mathematics involved and could translate one measurement into another. Look at it this way: wheat is old at six months, an oak is young at fifty years."

"Are you immortal?"

"No more than you. I'll die just as you will."

"But you don't grow any older."

"I don't get sick either. My body isnt subject to weakness and decay the way my remote ancestors' were. But I was born, therefore I must die."

"You'll still look young when I'm an old woman. Ash . . ."

Ah, she thought, it's well enough for you to talk. What people say doesnt bother you; you arent concerned with ridicule or malice. I'd call you inhuman if I didnt love you. Every superhuman carries the suggestion of inhumanity with it. Yes, yes—we're all selfish, mean, petty, grasping, cruel, nasty. Are we condemned for not seeing over our heads, for not being able to view ourselves with the judicial attachment of a million generations hence? I suppose we are.

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But it must be a self-condemnation, not an admonition, not even the example of a superior being.

She could not regret marrying Ash; she would not have changed anything. Except the one pitiful little resentment against aging while he didnt. No acquired wisdom, no thoughtful contemplation could reconcile her to the idea, could prevent her shuddering at the imagined looks, questions, snickers at a woman of fifty, sixty, seventy, married to a boy apparently in his twenties. Suppose young Ash had inherited his father's impervious constitution, as he seemed to have? She saw, despite the painful ludicrousness of it, her aged self peering from one to the other, unable to tell instantly which was the husband and which the son.

In her distress, and her soreness that she should be distressed, she drew off from the others, spoke little, spent hours away from the house, wandering in a not unpleasant abdication of thought and feeling. So, in the hot, sunny stillness of an August afternoon, she heard the music.

She knew immediately. There was no mistaking its relation to Ash's humming and its even closer kindship to the polyphony he drew from the radio. For a vanishing instant she thought, heartbeatingly, that young Ash—but this was far far beyond fumbling experiment. It could only come from someone—something—as far ahead of Ash as he was of her.

She listened, shocked, anguished, exhaled. There was nothing to see except the distant mountains, the cloudless sky, ripe fields, straight road, groups of slender trees, scrabbly knots of wild berries, untrammelled weeds. Nothing hovered overhead, no stranger in unearthly clothes strolled from behind the nearest hillock. Yet she had no doubt. She hurried back to the house and found Ash. "They are looking for you."

"I know. I've known for days."

"Why? What do they want?"

He did not answer directly. "Nan, do you think I've completely failed to fit into this life?"

She was genuinely astonished. "Failed! You've brought life, wisdom, health, goodness to everything you've touched. How can you talk of failing?"

"Because, after all . . . I havent become one of you."

"Add, 'Thank God.' You've done much more than become one of us. You've changed the face and spirit of everything around here. The land and those who live off it are better because of you. You changed me from a silly girl to—to whatever I am. You fathered young Ash. Don't ask me if a spoonful of sugar sweetens the ocean—let me believe it makes it that much less salt."

"But you are unhappy."

She shrugged. "Happiness is

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for those satisfied with what they have and want nothing more."

He asked, "And what do you want?"

"A world where I wouldnt have to hide you," she answered fiercely. "A world you and young Ash and his children and grandchildren could better without inviting suspicion and envy. A world outraged—not happy—with bickering, distrust, animosity and terror. I think you've brought such a world a little closer to becoming."

He said abruptly, "They want me back."

She heard the four words without comprehension; they conveyed no message to her. She searched his face as though the expression would enlighten her. "What did you say?"

"They want me back," he repeated. "They need me."

"But that's outrageous! First they send you to this savage world, then they decide they've made a mistake and whistle for you to come back."

"It isnt like that," protested Ash. "They didnt force me; I didnt have to accept the suggestion. Everyone agreed, on the basis of the very little we knew, that the people and society here (if either existed) would most likely be closer to the epoch I would naturally have fitted than the one into which I was born. I neednt have come; having come I could have returned."

"Force! What do you call the pressure of 'everyone agreed' if not force? And it was for your own good too. That excuse for wickedness must prevail from one end of the universe to the other. I wonder if your people are really less barbarian than mine."

He refused to argue, to defend the beings who threatened—if vainly—the life she led with her husband and son, the minute good Ash was doing in Evarts County, the hope that he could do more and on a larger scale. Ash in his humility thought them superior to him; she had never questioned this till now. But suppose their evolution had not been toward better than the development Ash represented, but worse—a subtle degeneracy? Suppose in gaining the abilities so awesome to Ash they had lost some of his probity and uprightness, reverting to a morality no higher—little higher, she amended in all honesty—than that of the earth in the year 1960?

"Of course you won't go?"

"They need me."

"So do I. So does young Ash."

He smiled tenderly at her. "I will not weigh the need of one or two against the need of millions, nor the need of love and comfort against the need for life. Such judgments lead only to self-justification, cruelty disguised as mercy, and destruction for the sake of rebuilding."

"Then you won't go?"

"Not unless you tell me to."

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Next day she walked through the orchard, recalling again its desolate condition before Ash came, Josey's face, her own unsettled heart. She walked through the new orchard where the young trees flourished without a twisted limb or fruitless branch. She walked through the new farm, never so hopeless as the homeplace, yet abused, exploited, ravaged. The fields were fair and green, the pasture lush and succulent. She came to the spot where she had been the day before and the music filled her ears and mind.

Fiercely she tried to recapture her reasoning, her indictment. The music did not plead, cajolé, argue with her. It was itself, outside such utility. Yet it was not proud or inexorable; removed from her only in space and time and growth, not in fundamental humanity. It was far beyond the simple components of communication she had learned from Ash, yet it was not utterly and entirely outside her understanding.

She listened for a long time—hours, it seemed. Then she went to the house. Ash put his arms around her and again, as so often, she was amazed how he could be loving without a tincture of brutality. "Oh Ash," she cried. "Oh Ash!"

Later she said, "Will you come back?"

"I hope so," he answered gravely.

"When—when will you go?"

"As soon as everything is taken care of. There won't be much; you have always attended to the business matters." He smiled; Ash had never touched money or signed a paper. "I'll take the train from Henryton; everyone will think I've gone East. After a while you can say I've been kept by family affairs. Perhaps you and the boy will leave after a few months, presumably to join me."

"No. I'll stay here."

"People will think—"

"Let them," she said defiantly. "Let them."

"I can find you anywhere, you know, if I can come back."

"You won't come back. If you do you'll find me here."

She had no difficulties with the harvest. As Ash said, she had taken care of the business end since her father's death. Hands were always eager to work at the Maxill's; produce merchants bid against each other for the crop. But next year?

She and the land could wither together without a husband's care. The lines on her face would deepen, her hair would gray, her mouth sag. The trees would die little by little, the fruit grow sparser, less and less perfect. The corn would come up more irregularly year by year, sickly, prey to parasites; stunted, gnarled, poor. Finally so little would grow it wouldnt pay to plant the fields. Then they or-

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chards would turn into dead wood, the hardier weeds take over, the land become waste. And she . . .

She knew she was hearing the sounds, the music, only in her imagination. But the illusion was so strong, so very strong, she thought for the moment she could distinguish Ash's own tones, his message to her, so dear, so intimate, so reassuring . . .

"Yes," she said aloud. "Yes, of course."

Because at last she understood. In the winter she would walk all over the land. She would pick up the hard clods from the ground and warm them in her fingers. In the spring she would plunge her arms into the sacks of seed, deeply, to the elbows, over and over. She would touch the growing shoots, the budding trees; she would walk over the land, giving herself over to it.

It would not be as though Ash were still there. It could never be like that. But the earth would be rich; the plants and trees would flourish. The cherries, apricots, plums, apples and pears would not be as many or so fine as they had been, nor the corn so even and tall. But they would grow, and her hands would make them grow. Her five-fingered hands.

Ash would not have come for nothing.

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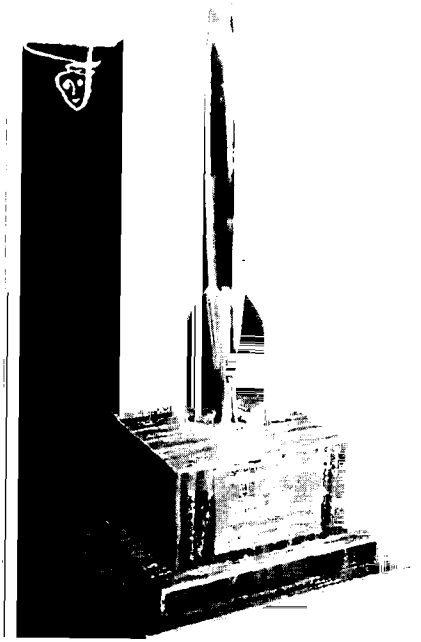

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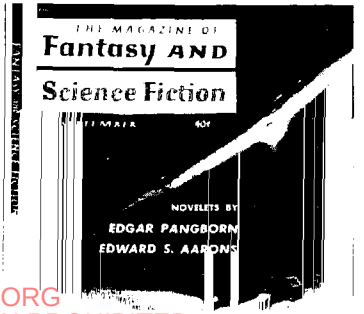

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